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MYSTERY MAGAZINE



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VOL. 26, NO. 6

NEW MIKE SHAYNE SHORT NOVEL

DEAD MAN'S HERITAGE

by BRETT HALLIDAY

Three deadly foes were looking for him in the night, as Mike Shayne took on the most baffling case of his career. Lust . . . hate . . . Murder were their names. And, led by a mad killer, they waited for Shayne in the Miami night.

2 to 48 —

NEW TRUE CRIME FEATURE

THE FALL OF AL CAPONE
DAVID MAZROFF 52

DEPARTMENT OF LOST STORIES

THREE WIVES TOO MANY
KENNETH FEARING 76

EXCITING SHORT STORIES

RUB THE WRONG WAY
PAUL FELDER 49

RAFT OF FEAR
CLAYTON MATTHEWS 96

WHY DON'T YOU ANSWER, THEODORE?
GAREN DRUSSAI 106

THE FATAL BLACK CHIP
RICHARD M. ROSE 110

HOLMES TAYLOR
Associate Editor
THE WOMAN IN BLACK
EDWARD WELLEN 123

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DEAD MAN'S HERITAGE

Lust . . . hate . . . murder—they all held carnival in that house of terror, as Mike Shayne took a last desperate gamble to bring a mad killer to bay.

by BRETT HALLIDAY



COILED IN THE sunlight, the brilliantly banded little snake was beautiful against the cool white wool pile of the bedroom carpet.

It was a small snake, with a black nose and brilliant black, crimson and gold bands completely circling its slender fifteen inches of body. As it layed in the sun it seemed more like a piece of animated jewelry or a domestic pet than what it was—the deadliest of all reptiles. It was the coral snake, little brother to the cobra.

The woman gasped when she saw

it there and pulled the robe close about her lovely throat. In herself she was as beautiful as the snake, but with a warmth no reptile could ever match. For a moment they watched each other in a blend of fascination and fear.

Then she snatched the brass poker from the set beside her fireplace and struck hard, again and again until the deadly little head was crushed and the expensive carpet stained and spoiled with blood. Even then she kept on pounding the limp body, though she knew the creature had to be dead.

Her golden hair fell loose about her face as she struck. The robe fell

THE NEW COMPLETE MIKE SHAYNE SHORT NOVEL



open to show bronzed shoulders and the creamy rise of high young breasts and its skirts swirled about small feet and long and shapely legs. Her blue eyes were wide and alert.

When the passion of rage and fear were spent she let the poker fall. Sunlight poured in the long french windows of the bedroom of the old Miami Beach home fronting on the Bay just south of Julia Tuttle Causeway, but she didn't seem to notice it at all. Nor did she pull the ornamental bell cord to summon a servant to her aid. Instead she went to the bedside telephone stand and dialed a number from the book.

"Is this the office of Michael Shayne?" she asked. "I'd like an appointment to talk to him just as soon as possible. Yes, it's important. Someone's trying to murder me. Can anything be more important than that?"

I

MIKE SHAYNE, private detective, had finished a late breakfast he'd cooked in the kitchenette of his downtown apartment and was knotting a tie preparatory to going out when his secretary Lucy Hamilton called from the office.

"She's coming right over," Lucy told him. "It sounds as if she really believes she's in danger, Michael. I told her you'd be in shortly. I hope you don't mind."

"You did perfectly right, Angel,"

Shayne said. "I'll be over in just a few minutes."

He hung up the phone and finished dressing as rapidly as possible. Shayne had been without a case for a couple of weeks and was anxious to get back in harness. Maybe it was the early season cold spell Miamians had been experiencing for the past three days that had set off a burst of ambition.

In any case he walked the few blocks from his apartment hotel with a brisk step and gave Lucy Hamilton an unusually enthusiastic good morning when he came in.

They hadn't long to wait before the girl who'd phoned came hurrying up the stairs from Flagler Street and knocked at the front office door.

Shayne liked her looks from the first. Her red-gold hair had a natural curl and her blue eyes met his directly. The clothes she wore were well-styled without being in any way extreme. The skirt was short but not mini-short, and showing just enough of the leg to make him wish for more. The linen suit was obviously the best available. She was taller than Lucy Hamilton, but beautifully curved and utterly feminine. He guessed her age at about twenty-five.

"Mr. Shayne," she said, "can I speak to you privately?"

"I have no secrets from my secretary," Shayne said. "Neither do my clients." He waved her to a

comfortable chair between his desk and Lucy's.

The two women gave each other long, careful looks.

"If that suits you," she said, "of course it suits me. First of all you were recommended to me in the highest terms by a very old mutual friend, Tim Rourke." She paused.

"Tim and I have been good friends since before you were born," Shayne said. "Times were he's been in my office more than his own at the *News*."

"He's spoken of you many times," she said. "I called him Uncle Tim when I was only five and used to tease him to tell about some of your wonderful cases. Of course he was actually mother's friend. My mother was Inez Evans. When Tim knew her first, it was as Inez Armstrong."

"Of course," Lucy Hamilton broke in. "That's who you reminded me of. That's where all those good looks of yours are from."

Shayne was thinking fast to bring back the memories of the World War Two years in Miami. Inez Armstrong had been known as a beauty since the day her Air Force husband the colonel had brought her to the Beach. He'd been second in command of the big Beach training post for half a year.

Inez had stayed in town even after he was ordered to active duty in the England-based bomber fleets. A year after his plane was exploded by ack-ack fire over Berlin, his widow had married old Edgar



Evans, who was known as one of the richest men on the Beach side of Biscayne Bay.

Tim Rourke, then a rising young writer for the *News*, had been quite broken up by her new marriage.

"I remember your mother now," Shayne said. "She isn't still living, is she?"

"Oh no. She died five years ago. If she hadn't, I wouldn't be here at all Mr. Shayne."

"Suppose you tell me why you are, Miss Evans."

"Call me Edith," she said. "I'm here because I need you to do two things for me. First, stop whoever's trying to kill me. Then prove for me that I am who I say I am."

Shayne was interested.

"What makes you think anyone is trying to kill you?" he asked. "You must know that's a serious accusation to make against anyone and even more serious if you can't prove it."

"It's been proved to my satisfaction today," she said. "This

morning somebody put a coral snake into my bedroom. If we hadn't been having this cold spell, it'd have stayed under the bed or curled up in a dark closet till I stepped too near with a bare foot. If I scared it, the thing would strike me. You know there's no serum that would help me then."

"Don't be too sure of that," Shayne told her. "There may not be a serum, but a blood transfusion from that fellow who runs the Serpentarium down the highway could save you. He's been bitten so many times himself that his blood is a pretty good serum for any kind of snake venom. Besides, what makes you think the snake didn't crawl in there by itself?"

"To a second floor bedroom?" she asked. "Hardly likely. We have a custom built house anyway. Old Grandmother Evans was deathly afraid of snakes and scorpions and even harmless lizards. When the house was built even the openings for pipes and wires were screened to keep out any sort of creeping thing."

"That was a long time ago."

"It was only this morning," she said, "that a coral snake crawled out to where the sun had warmed my rug, and I found it. It was just ten days ago that a heavy red Cuban tile fell off the roof—or at least it fell into the patio—and just missed my head. It was only last week that somebody fired a rifle at me

from the house while I was standing on the seawall."

"How do you know a rifle was fired at you" Shayne said. "Have you got the bullet?"

"No," she said. "I said I was standing on the sea wall. I heard a small calibre gun fired, probably a .22. I heard the bullet zip past my ear, and I saw the splash it made hitting the surface of the Bay. It means it was fired down at me from one of the upstairs windows, but when I looked around there was nobody in sight."

"Who has a gun in the house?" Shayne asked. "As a matter of fact can you be sure the shot you heard was a shot, that the splash you saw wasn't a fish jumping or a kid throwing a rock?"

"How do you know a gunshot when you hear it?" she countered. "I've been a target shooter since I was ten years old. We all liked to shoot, from Father on down. There must be a dozen target rifles in the house."

"The shot changes things," Shayne said. "Now—why would anyone in the house want you shot? Why and who?"

"As to who," Edith said, "it could be anyone in the house except maybe a couple of the servants. It goes back to the why—which is I don't know if I can prove who I am. If you know what I mean—"

"I'm not sure I do know." Shayne tugged at the lobe of his left ear. "You tell me you're Edith

Evans. Surely that's something that ought to be easy enough to prove. This is your home town and all."

"You don't understand," she said, "and I don't suppose I can blame you. I can prove I'm Edith Evans and my mother was Inez Evans. There's all sorts of records I can use to do that. The trouble is —how can I prove that my father was Edgar Evans? Especially how can I prove it, if he insists I'm my mother's child by somebody else? If he's willing to go to court and swear I'm not his child?"

"You need a lawyer and not a detective for that," Shayne said. "Of course he'd have to prove he wasn't your father, though I can't think why anyone'd want to do that. It might not be easy there either. You'd better go back and tell me what this is all about."

"It started a few months ago," Edith said. "About last July I think. Father called me into his office. He said he had reason to think I wasn't really his child, that my mother had deceived him and that my father was really her lover. He said he couldn't overlook it. He was going to change his will."

"Oh," Shayne said, "so that's it. How much money is involved?"

"Millions," she conceded, "but you're wrong. That's not it. I have some money that mother left me that had come to her from her parents. I've got a good education. I could work if I had to. A lot more than the money, it's my mother's

good name I want cleared. She wasn't the sort of woman to do that. She wasn't. I know it, and I want it proved so everybody will know it."

"What makes you think a detective can help you? It seems to me a good law firm—"

"No," she insisted, "I need a detective. I need the sort of detective Uncle Tim has always said you were. I need somebody who can and will do things and find out things a lawyer couldn't. For instance I want you to get something out of father's safe for me tonight."

"Now hold on," Shayne laughed. "I don't care what Tim Rourke has told you, I'm not a safe cracker. I don't have educated finger tips. Fact is I don't know one fact about opening safe locks, even if I wanted to risk something so far outside the law."

"You hold on," Edith said. "You don't have to crack the safe. I found the combination among some old papers in a desk in the attic. It was the original copy supplied when the safe was installed. Nobody knows I copied it off. Besides I don't want you to rob the safe of money or anything."

"All I want is my mother's diary for the year I was born. I know he has it in there. He admitted it. If you take it I can arrange a perfect alibi for myself while you're doing it. After that snake, though, I don't dare wait any longer. This is Thursday and the servants' night

out. I'll find a way to divert everybody staying home. I'll give you a map of the house, and leave a side door open. I've got to have that diary."

"Why that particular diary?" Shayne asked. "Do you know what's in it?"

"No, I don't. I never read it, but Father has. He says there were some clues in there that led him to the truth, whatever he means by that. I've got to know. If there are clues for him, there'll be clues for me too. Otherwise I don't know where to start. He didn't even tell me who he suspects was my father. All he said was he finally knew my mother was no good and I wasn't his daughter. He was going to cut me out of the will."

"Were you the sole heir?" Shayne asked. "Who stands to gain by the new will?"

"Any of them. Maybe all of them. Is that so important?"

"It's important to whoever might try to kill you," Shayne said.

"Yes," Edith said, "I guess it is. Well, as far as I know the last will he made divides everything except a few personal bequests between me and my brother—that is, Carl, my half brother by Father's first wife. He might get it all by a new will. On the other hand there's Aunt Anita. She's Father's old maid sister and has always lived with him. I think she hated both his wives and hates Carl and me now. And may-

be—" She stopped without finishing.

"Maybe who?" Shayne demanded. "I can't help you at all unless you level with me. You know that."

"Well," she said reluctantly. "I don't like to say this, but there's Mrs. Porter. She's been housekeeper ever since before Mother died; and people have thought she was more than that to Father. He never married again, you know. And even an old man can—" She was obviously embarrassed.

"We understand what could happen, dear," Lucy Hamilton said from her desk. "Do you have any positive knowledge that it did?"

"Why no, I don't," Edith said. "Not if you mean pictures or affidavits or something like that. I honestly believe though that there has been a close personal relationship. It's been just taken for granted for years in the family. Carl and I don't like it, of course, but we never really held it against them. I suppose Aunt Anita did. She seemed to hold everything against everybody all the time."

"I get the picture," Shayne said. "These days it can happen in the best of families, and it could give her an interest in getting your name out of the will."

"You must see too why I can't wait any longer," Edith said. She fished in her soft leather shoulder strap bag and brought out a piece of folded paper. "This is a plan of the house and grounds," she said,



unfolding it. "The safe is here in the second floor study. Father's bedroom is in the other wing over here. Right after dinner he takes a nap. The last year or so he's gotten quite infirm. The door at the back of the house where I've marked an X will be unlocked.

"We finish dinner by eight o'clock. Tonight I'll see that everyone is in the living room. Carl has some movies of his last vacation trip West that he's been wanting to show us. This will be a good night for us. You come in just before nine. It will take only a few minutes for you to open the safe and get the diary out."

"What if I find other papers dealing with the matter?"

"Use your own judgment whether to read them yourself or bring them to me," Edith said. "In other words, you're the expert in these things. I'll back up any action you feel

necessary. Just leave any money."

"Speaking of money—" Shayne said.

"You won't have to worry," she told him. "I'm not a charity client. I said I have money of my own. I can pay your fees even if I never get a cent from Father's will. Of course if you prove all I want to know, there'll be a bonus."

"Considering the amount of money Edgar Evans has that would be fair enough," Shayne said.

"Good," Edith said. "That means you'll do it. You won't regret it, Mr. Shayne. You're saving my life, you know."

When she'd gone Shayne looked at Lucy Hamilton.

"I'll call Tim right now," she said.

"You're a mind reader, Angel."

Tim Rourke wasn't in his office at the *News*, but Lucy Hamilton left word for them to locate him and have him call. She put the coffee on the stove in the back office, and presently brought Mike Shayne a cup that was hot and black, laced with brandy as he liked it, and strong enough to stand a spoon in.

"This is good for the soul, Michael," she said.

He took her small hand in his big one and held it for a moment. "It's you that are good for my soul, Angel. The coffee just oils the thinking machine. I've a hunch this case will need thinking about."

"They all do," Lucy said, "and one way or another you handle them."

all. Why should this one be any different?"

"Because it looks too easy on the surface," Shayne told her with a grin. "Getting that diary tonight ought to be easy as picking a grapefruit. If it doesn't tell what we need, there are all sorts of hospital records made when a child's born to a really rich family—fingerprints, footprints, blood types, all sorts of things. Even when things happen a quarter century back, there are people who remember the rich. The trail a man like Evans and his family leave never really gets cold."

"Then why are you worrying, Michael?"

"Just a hunch, I guess. I don't like things that look easy."

"So you whomp up a hunch to make them look hard after all. Just like a man, if I may say so. Don't. Let this stay easy and collect a nice fat fee. Then when it's over you can take a cruise out to the Islands for a week and get some real sun and rest."

She broke off to answer the phone on her desk, then put her hand over the mouthpiece.

"Some man," she told Shayne. "He wants you, and he won't give his name."

Shayne picked up the extension instrument on his own cluttered desk. "Shayne here."

The voice on the other end was hoarse and rather obviously disguised. "They say you're a smart man, Mr. Shayne, and smart men

don't play with fire. Forget the Evans girl, or you'll be burned."

"Why will I?" Shayne asked. "Who is this calling? Give me something to go on, if you want me to listen. I don't like advice without a name to put to it."

The voice said, "Just listen, shamus. Listen hard." It could have been a man trying to imitate a woman. "We don't care what you like. This is the only warning you'll get. Pay attention to it."

The wire clicked dead at the other end.

Shayne looked over his desk at Lucy. "I had a good hunch, Angel. Somebody else is dealing himself in already."

II

IT TOOK A while for the *News* to locate Tim Rourke. When they did it was in a downtown bar where the gangling reporter and feature writer was finishing a late breakfast of whiskey-sour and cigarettes. He didn't bother to phone Mike Shayne, but walked on over to the office instead. He found Shayne with his feet on the desk, apparently wrapped in thought, while Lucy Hamilton pored through a stack of old files dated 1945 and 1946.

"That's it," he said. "When all else fails and pure genius has its back to the wall, just call on good old Tim. The super intelligence of the Fourth Estate will always save the day."

"You didn't call us," Shayne said. "We called you, so shut up till you know what this is all about." He got a half-full bottle of rye whiskey and a glass out of the back office and put them at Rourke's elbow.

Then he gave his friend a fast rundown on the situation.

"You knew these people a lot better than I did at the time," Shayne said. "I hope you've kept up with them. At least the beauty still 'Uncle Tim's' you to me. Did you ever hear any of this before?"

"Yes and no," Tim Rourke said. "Mostly no, I'm afraid. There was rumors way back when little Edie was born, but I never took them seriously. Inez just wasn't that kind of a woman."

"You should know," the detective said.

"I ought to get mad at that insinuation," Rourke said, setting his glass down. "If I don't it's only because there's some truth in what you say. Lord knows I tried hard enough to make Inez see things my way. She never would."

"As I remember," Shayne said, "you were quite a Don Juan at the time. Anybody who beat you out would have had to be good."

"Or rich," Rourke agreed. "That was Evans' big attraction, a lot of us thought. But no matter what she married him for, none of her real friends ever thought she wouldn't stand by the bargain. It just wouldn't have been like her not to."

"What do you know about the family right now?"

"Not as much as you'd like me to," Rourke said. "Naturally I haven't seen as much of them since Inez died. Old Edgar's gotten himself pretty much out of circulation anyway. He was a lot older than she when they married. Must be close to eighty by now, and seldom comes out of that big house on the Beach. He probably spends most of the time in his bedroom there."

"Old enough to loosen some of the gears in his head?" Shayne asked.

"It might be. Even a smart man can get senile delusions after a while. It could account for his turning against Edie all of a sudden."

"Particularly if somebody else in the house wanted him to bad enough to begin a little loving family brain-washing," Shayne said. "A rich old man tends to be suspicious of everybody around him in the natural course of things. It'd be easy enough to plant the wrong ideas when and where they'd do the most harm."

Tim Rourke nodded. "It could be that way. Edie was always a great favorite with the old boy. Some of us thought that as the child of his old age, she'd always have an inside track with him."

"What about the son?"

"Carl? He'd be twenty years older than Edie, old enough to be her father himself. He's a good smart business man and has headed the family companies for years now.

They say he's increased their holdings by millions. Even if Edie inherited half control, he'd stay the real man in charge. No reason for him to be afraid of her. At least not from where I sit."

"Thanks," the big detective said. "See what you can find out about the whole family, will you, Tim? I'd appreciate anything you can dig up for the whole period after Inez married old Edgar. You know the sort of thing."

"I know," Rourke said. "The power of the press is yours to command. Call me tonight and see what I've got for you."

Shayne spent the afternoon going through old files and records of the war and post-war years with Lucy Hamilton. He often did that and frequently found leads or odds and ends of information to guide and stimulate his thinking. This time he got nothing he didn't already know.

He took Lucy out for an early dinner at one of their favorite steak houses on the Boulevard, and then dropped her off at her apartment. She asked him up for a drink, but he refused.

"I'm going to try for that diary my client wants," he said. "If it's as easy as she seems to think, I ought to be back on this side of the Bay by nine-thirty and I can bring the book up here to read. I'll take a rain check on the drink till then."

"Just be careful, Michael," she

said. "Your drink and I will be waiting."

"The drink isn't important," he said. "You are."

"May you always think so," she said, and slipped out of the car.

Shayne drove north to the new Julia Tuttle Causeway and across to the solid wall of towers and lighted windows that marked Miami Beach.

The detective parked his car on one of the residential blocks on the Bay Side of the island and walked the rest of the way to the Evans estate. It was one of the older, Mediterranean style mansions surrounded by gardens and tropical plantings. With its pool, detached garages and gardens it took up almost half of a city block. The perimeter was bounded by a low wall of local "coral" rock backed by flowering bougainvillea and hibiscus hedge.

The wall would have been little obstacle for an active man, even if the gate Edith had mentioned hadn't been right where she'd shown it on her map. It was unlocked, as she'd promised.

Shayne checked his watch. It was exactly seventeen minutes to nine o'clock. He entered the gateway and followed a path that led to one of the big house's several rear doors. The area was darkened by the foliage of big trees, and further masked by shrubs and flowers.

At one point he was able to make out the tall windows of the main

living room. They were partially darkened, and inside he could see the light-flickering screen where amateur movies were being shown as he'd been told they would be.

The door to which his map led was about midway of the back of the big house. It opened easily into a sort of anteroom at the foot of a rear stairwell—apparently for the use of servants going up to clean the upstairs bedrooms. Two other doors led, he assumed, to the kitchens and the front hallway. At least that's what the map indicated.

The room Shayne wanted was a combined study and office on the second floor, only one door from the entry to the rear stairs. It wasn't locked, so he stepped quickly in and closed the door to the hall behind him.

Even the furniture was arranged exactly as in the map he'd studied that afternoon. The big ornate desk was facing the windows in front of him. On its right were two three-drawer metal filing cabinets. To the left of the desk was the heavy, old-fashioned office safe. It was about two feet square and mounted on small but strong iron wheels so it could be moved about.

Most wealthy people were satisfied with the usual wall safe, but Evans had apparently felt he needed this larger and much stronger protective device. It was too heavy to be taken out of the house by anything less effective than a crane hoist.



LUCY HAMILTON

Shayne used the small pen-type flash light he carried, and muffled even this light behind several folds of handkerchief linen until he could just barely make out the markings on the dial of the safe. The dial itself turned smoothly and soundlessly, and the combination he'd memorized was correct. He had the steel door open within seconds.

The easily identified desk-type diary was in the first drawer he pulled open at random. He shoved it under the waistband of his pants, where the belt would hold it, and started to search the mass of papers

inside he drawers and pigeonholes of the safe.

There was really no warning, unless a slight movement of air on the back of his neck could be so called. There was certainly no unusual sound or change of light, but Shayne suddenly knew that the door to the hall behind him had opened.

A man like Mike Shayne develops his own private and personal radar to warn of danger.

The detective was crouched over facing the safe and with his back to the door by which he'd entered the room. He took his heels off the carpet to put all the weight on the balls of his feet and began a swift and silent pivot there in the dark. His aim was to make a fast, football-style tackle about the knees of whoever stood there, and bring the man down to his own level where the intruder could be knocked out or silenced.

Shayne wasn't quite fast enough. He'd barely begun to turn when the leather wrapped blackjack took him above and behind the right ear. He went down on his face with a thud; without even time to curse himself for a fool for being so easily bushwhacked.

Whoever hit him must have wanted to be sure the blow wasn't fatal—or else, like an amateur, he misjudged the amount of force needed behind the blow. As it was, Shayne was knocked out, but it could only have been for a matter of seconds. When he began to re-

turn to a blurry half-consciousness the ancient grandfather's clock in the first floor hall was striking nine.

Shayne tried to push himself up off the floor, but his arms weren't quite ready to cooperate and he fell back. Before his face hit the carpet a second time he got a quick glance around the room. The door to the hall was open, and he was alone in the den-office room.

The clock struck its final note and was almost instantly followed by the wailing note of a police-car siren some distance away. Shayne's instinct told him the car was headed his way. With his own head still reeling he managed to force himself up off the floor and out of the room.

As he came to his feet Shayne stumbled over something lying on the carpet. Thinking it was probably the hat which had fallen off his head when he was struck, he reached down. It was the blackjack with which he'd been hit. He searched the darkness with his hands but failed to find his hat. The siren was coming rapidly closer.

In desperation he abandoned the search for the hat, shoved the heavy "sap" into his jacket pocket and made for the stairs. As he did so the diary fell out of his waistband. He grabbed it up, shoved it into his other jacket pocket and took off down the stairs.

When Shayne got to the gate by which he'd come on to the estate grounds it was closed and padlocked. He cursed, but got over the

wall just as the prowler car screamed up the front drive. He was shielded by shrubbery from the sight of the men in the car, but he made himself walk at a normal pace till he got to his car. That was so as not to attract the attention of any neighbor who'd run to his window at the sound of the siren. As far as he could tell he wasn't seen.

Back at his car Shayne took off at once for the Causeway back to Miami. There was neither a road block nor a motorcycle cop to be seen, so he headed south for Lucy's apartment. Even driving slowly enough to avoid making waves in the Route #1 traffic, he was ringing her bell by 9:15.

Lucy Hamilton was wise enough not to ask any questions till she'd wiped off his face, gentled the bruise over his right ear, and poured him a tumbler half full of his favorite cognac. Even then all she said was: "Where's your hat? In the car?"

"No," he said. "Like a damned fool I lost it back there. It must have fallen off when I was slugged and gotten under or behind something. Anyway I couldn't find it and the police car was practically on top of the place. I couldn't afford to be caught there."

"Unless that hat went further under or behind something than it possibly could, Michael, it's going to be just as bad as if they found you there in person. They'll trace it to you."

"Of course they will," he said

with a groan. "It's even got my initials on the band in gold letters. Still I'll swear it was stolen from me and put there to implicate me. I was never in the place myself. They'll have to prove I'm not lying and that'll give me some time."

"You're going to need it, Michael," she said practically.

He finished his brandy and held out the glass for a refill. "Don't I know it? At least I got the diary." He took it out of the jacket and put it on the living room table. "And this—this is what I was slugged with." He put the blackjack on top of the leather covered diary.

"Michael," she asked. "Did you bleed much where you were hit?"

"Not much," he said. "I wasn't hit hard enough or I'd have been out more than a few seconds."

Then he realized the reason she'd asked and picked up the sap to look at it under the light. One whole side of the striking head was dark with dried blood soaked into the leather binding. There were a couple of hairs glued on by the blood, and it took no expert to know they weren't Shayne's.

"This thing wasn't dropped by mistake," Shayne said. "It was left for me to pick up and cart away with me like a fool. That blood came from somebody else's head and this thing in my pocket proves I bashed in that head. Angel, that whole business was a trap, and I walked right into it. I opened the door and walked right in like a

pig going to the knacker to have his throat cut."

"You fooled them in the end though," Lucy said. "You were supposed to stay on the floor unconscious until the police found you. You wouldn't have had any chance at all then, but you were too strong. You got up and got away out of the house."

She finished pouring him another drink of brandy and put the glass in his hand.

"Oh, Michael," she said and leaned over to touch the bruised place on his head. His nostrils dilated to the warm, clean smell of her body. "Do you want me to take this blackjack down to the end of the block and throw it in the Bay?"

"It's the first place they'll look if they find me here," he said. "Besides it may tell me something I need to know in time." He thought for a minute. "Wrap it in wax paper and then metal foil and put it in your food freezer under some of the steaks and stuff you have there. I doubt if anyone would bother to unwrap every package there unless he was dead sure he'd find something. For all they know I threw this into the Bay off the Causeway."

It was the best he could think of at the moment. He hoped it was good enough. Only time would tell.

The phone in the apartment rang, the one which was on Lucy's personal unlisted number—the other

was an extension of the office phone. It was Tim Rourke calling.

"Just checking in," he said. "Would you know where I could locate the maestro?"

Shayne took the phone out of her hand. "Hello, Tim. Have you got anything interesting for me?"

"Not very," Rourke admitted. "I think maybe you better move yourself on down here though. You might have callers where you are."

"What makes you think so?"

"What have you been doing? Your good friend Gentry at Headquarters says Petey is getting out a warrant for you." He meant Miami Beach Police Chief Peter Painter. "If he sends a copy of it across the Bay, Will says he'll have to pick you up for questioning."

"I'm not too worried," Shayne said. "Petey can't prove breaking and entering."

"What's the matter with you?" Rourke yelled over the instrument. "This ticket's not for B.&E. The charge is murder, you big ape."

Shayne thought of the blood and hair on the leather sap.

"I'll be right down," he said.

He hung up the phone and said to Lucy, "You haven't seen me since dinner, Angel. Start washing your hair or something in case of callers. I don't know why but any woman looks innocent in soapsuds and an old wrapper."

Shayne drove only partway to the News offices and parked his car in the lot serving the Art Movie House

on Biscayne Boulevard. He walked the rest of the way over to the bay-front, being careful to note that the *News* wasn't staked out.

Rourke was in his private office. He'd put on a white dinner jacket and turtle-neck white sweater around his own thin throat. Shayne laughed at him.

"There isn't a turtle in Dade County that wouldn't envy you that neck," he said. "It was just made for that sweater."

"Shut up, laughing boy," Rourke said. "You got mighty little time right now to spend laughing at high fashion clothes. Why did you do it?"

"Laugh?" Shayne said. "I just couldn't help it." He took Rourke's bottle of rye off the desk and fished a glass out of one of the drawers. "Can't I ever teach you to like good brandy?"

"Some day," Rourke said, "you'll go too far. I've said so for years. You know this may have been the day, don't you?"

"I don't know what you're talking about."

"I'm talking about old Edgar Evans, the man you've had me doing research on all afternoon. I'm talking about him lying in his own bed with his head smashed out of shape and his brains running out on the pillow like the yoke of a broken egg."

Shayne drank off his rye at a single gulp. He didn't refill the glass.



Tim Rourke

"So that's who it is?" he said, half to himself. "What a royal fool I've been this time."

"Is that all you can say?" Tim Rourke asked. "You think it's just foolish? If Petey ever gets the cuffs on you, he's going to want better than that before he takes them off again."

"You know I didn't kill any bed-ridden old man," Shayne said. "Deep down I'm sure Petey knows it too, even though he's been trying

to nail my hide to the barn door for twenty years. Somebody set up a frame, but I don't think they can prove I did something I didn't."

"I'm glad you think they can't," Rourke said. "Myself, I wouldn't make any big bets they can't."

"Okay then. Just what have they got?"

Rourke held up one thin hand and began to count off the points on his fingers.

"One," he said, "they've got the body. It's so badly bashed they figure the killer was a powerful man.

"Two, they have a motive. Dear little Edie blew her cool and admitted she'd asked you to get something out of the safe for her. So far she's refused to say what. Just insists it was her property and nothing was stolen. When Edgar spotted you, you could kill in self-defense.

"Three, they can place you on the scene. Oh, you were careful enough not to leave prints on the safe itself, but they have a smudged thumbprint off the door knob where you went out. They've also got your hat with the gold initials in the band. It was found under the dead man's bed with some of his blood still wet on the brim. How much more do you think they need?"

Shayne groaned in spite of himself.

"That's plenty for openers," he said.

"It's more than that," Rourke

emphasized. "It's enough so the Grand Jury will have to bind you over for trial. So what have you got to tell them? You don't deny you were there, do you?"

"You know why I was there. I was trying to help out your beautiful girl friend. That's all it was and it wasn't important enough to kill anybody about. Not even if I'd been caught in the act it wasn't. Anyway I wasn't caught by any alarmed old man. Somebody was waiting for me to show up and be fitted right into the frame he had ready. The only mistake he made was not to sap me hard enough so I'd still be on the floor when the cops arrived. Which reminds me—what tipped them to show up so promptly?"

"That's one thing that'll go for your story of a frame. It was an anonymous phone call. Not from one of their regular pigeons. It said you were breaking into the safe at that address. Even Petey can't claim a call like that wasn't aimed at you just like a gun. Whoever made it knew a lot more about what was going on than he should."

Shayne tugged at his ear lobe. "We both keep saying "he". Why not "she"? I didn't see who slugged me. It could have been man or woman. I suppose it could even have been my client herself. She could have wanted the old man killed before he could change his will, and figured I'd be a good one to hang it on."

Rourke was disturbed. "You don't

seriously go for that, do you? That's not Edith's style any more than taking a lover was her mother's. She wouldn't do it. I'm sure of that."

"Somebody did it," Shayne said, "and put my neck right on the chopping block. The whole thing was a trap. Now who else knew I was going to drop by for tea to-night? Who else knew exactly when I was coming and what I was going to be doing in the house so I could be hit like shooting fish in a bucket? All that diary bit was a good cover to get me there. Damn it, Tim. I was set up like a clay pigeon. Who had a better chance to do it than Edith? Tell me, if you can."

"Circumstantial evidence, Mike. You've no real proof."

"How much real proof has Petey got? Everything but a convincing motive as things stand. If he accepts my story of the frame, then Edith has the motive to kill and the opportunity to set up the whole frame." Shayne shook his head stubbornly. "If my story's true, and it is, everything points right now to Edith as the killer."

"She was watching home movies with her brother, her aunt and the housekeeper when the old man was killed and you were sapped," Rourke protested. "What does that do to your case?"

"Unless they were all holding hands in a row, it doesn't do a thing to it," Shayne growled. "Home movies are shown in a dark room.

I saw enough from outside to know this one was dark. People usually go to sleep if they don't watch the movies, or else they get wrapped up watching for themselves to show. Anybody could slip out for a few minutes without it's being noticed. No, that sounds like a good alibi only till a good prosecutor goes to work on it. After that it doesn't mean a thing."

"Do you mean that, Mike?" Rourke asked. "Do you seriously think that girl is a cold blooded murderer, the kind could plan a thing like that in advance, set you up and then go through with it?" .. "I don't know if she did," Shayne said stubbornly. "Somebody certainly did. Somebody who knew exactly what they were doing and how to go about it. You weren't the one set up for the kill, Tim. I was. I don't like to think a client would do that to me, and a young girl at that. But what can I think? The facts put her or me on the spot and I know I'm innocent."

"Well then. What are you going to do about it?"

"The only thing I can do," Shayne said. "I'm going to try to find out who the killer really was and then prove it. Which brings up another question. What did you find out for me? Anything important?"

"Maybe so, maybe not," Tim Rourke said. "I spent most of the afternoon going over clippings from our morgue here at the paper and

making phone calls to some of the old-timers who were here in those days and in a position to know what went on in the big money set. Tonight I got myself invited to a dinner where I'd meet some of Inez' old pals from the war years. Of course I couldn't come right out and say what I wanted to know, but I could drop a remark here and a question there and get people talking."

"So—?" Shayne asked.

"So, if old Edgar had reason to be jealous of anybody at all, which I seriously doubt, there was only one likely candidate. He was down here during 1942 as a recruit and went from here to cadet school in the Army Air Corps. He graduated as a navigator lieutenant and was sent to Europe. In 1945 he came back, wounded, to the vet's hospital in Coral Gables.

"The war was still on and it was the thing for women in Inez' crowd to go to the hospital and cheer up the men especially if they were good-looking young captains and not too badly hurt. There's some said they'd known each other before, either when he was stationed here or back in New York before the war. However that was, they were seen together around Miami and the Beach at the races and parties of one sort or another."

"What was his name?"

"Give me time, Mike. I'm coming to that. I want to make the point first that at the time nobody really

thought anything out of the way was going on. They saw each other in public places, and never went out alone. The Beach was a great place for gossip when there was any hook to hang it on. In this case there's no record of malicious talk. If there had been any, I'd have remembered it myself anyway. Right then I thought Inez was the ultimate miracle in womanhood."

Rourke paused and Shayne broke in. "That might be why you didn't hear anything. You wouldn't want to hear things that tarnished your ideal woman, and gossips would hesitate to tell you."

"Nonsense," Rourke said. "Gossips love to rub salt in an open wound. Besides I'd have known if Inez and Ralph were up to anything. I swear I'd have smelled it in the air."

"Leaving your nose out of it, what did you say the lucky man's name was?"

"I didn't. But it was MacClane, Ralph MacClane. Captain Ralph MacClane. He came from New York. He was a Columbia graduate and went back to New York to live after the hospital discharged him. As far as I can find out he hasn't been back to Miami in all these years."

"How long after he left was Edith Evans born?"

"About five months. Soon enough so she would have known she was pregnant before he went away. She could have told him if she'd wanted.

But I think it was Edgar's child." Rourke was vehement about it. "If it hadn't been his child, Inez would have divorced him and gone to Ralph with the baby. I swear she would. I know it."

"None of us," Mike Shayne reminded him, "can be absolutely sure what he'd do himself in a crisis. So how can we be that certain what somebody else would do? You have to remember there were millions of dollars at stake here. Or was this Ralph as rich as Edgar? Now what other reason did Edgar have to get jealous?"

"Only one thing I can be sure of. The baby's hair was red-gold, particularly when she was a little tyke. When Edith was three or four years old she was practically a redhead, and a freckled redhead at that. Later on she grew out of it, at least her head got yellower, though she kept the freckles for years."

"What's hair color got to do with it anyway?"

"MacClane was red Irish, Mike. Nobody else in Inez' or Edgar's side of the family either had red hair. That's not much to use for evidence though. A redhead can pop up once in a while in any family."

"Yeah," Shayne said. "That's gossip-evidence. While we're talking about women, though what about this Mrs. Porter, the housekeeper? Was she Edgar's mistress?"

Tim Rourke nodded. "Everybody who should know will tell you yes.

The Porter woman's been part of that household since before Inez died. I've even heard some dumb cop picked her and Evans up for necking in a car back then. Any-way she stayed on, and they say Evans made a real fool of himself about her for the past five years."

"How much fool can an old boy pushing eighty make of himself?" Shayne asked. "It doesn't sound right."

"Apparently he made enough so a lot of people noticed," Rourke said. "I'm sure of that. Even old Edgar's big-mouthed sister was squawking all over town about how bad her brother was, and how she hated the woman."

"She never got the affair broken off?"

"My bet," Rourke said, "is she never even tried that. The old girl didn't have a dime of her own. No matter how much she might dislike her brother's behavior, she was in no position to do anything about it."

Tim Rourke poured himself another drink.

"Guessing hoes no potatos," he said with the sententious gravity of a man beginning to feel his liquor. "It's time to be up and away, my boy, before the minions of the law come seeking you here. You know they will. Gentry may not think you killed anybody, but his job won't let him ignore a warrant. And if I know Petey Painter he'll have a warrant for you out by now."

"When Gentry calls," Shayne

said, "just tell him I didn't do it. Tell him to keep his boys looking in the wrong brush patches for a few hours, and I'll prove it."

"Are you sure you'll prove it?"
"Of course I'm sure."

III

MIKE SHAYNE only wished he could be as confident as he sounded. The only real out he could see at the moment involved tossing his own client to the wolves by accusing her of framing him for a murder she'd committed herself. It went against his grain to even think of such a thing. In his years as a private detective Shayne had grown accustomed to considering his client's interests the same as his own.

Added to that he had a strong inclination to share Tim Rourke's belief in Edith's decency and integrity. A man in his profession has to become a shrewd judge of human nature. Instinct told him the girl had not betrayed him.

It was just too bad there wasn't any way of putting two pounds of instinct in an attache case and turning it over to the Grand Jury.

He was on the spot and he knew it. Before the police caught up to him and put him in a cell he had to be able to prove his innocence. Knowing and proving are two very different things, and no one knew it better than the big redhead.

He made it to his car without trouble and went north on N.E.

Second Ave. as far as Twenty-Eighth Street. There was probably already a prowler looking for him on the Boulevard, but—being Gentry's men—they wouldn't find him unless he practically did the job for them. For that reason he'd like to go back to the Beach by one of the downtown Causeways.

If he went far enough north to get out of Miami the various police forces of the smaller municipalities would already be alerted by Painter's all-points-bulletin and wouldn't hesitate to grab him.

Of course Painter would know Shayne would figure this out. He'd have the Beach ends of the more southerly Causeways especially well staked out.

As usual Shayne looked for a simple solution. He drove north on Second Ave. all the way to Seventy-Ninth St. Shopping Center and parked outside an all night restaurant. Then he walked back Seventy-Ninth St. for a couple of blocks and took a bus across to the beach.

The Seventy-Ninth Street Causeway was sometimes called The Strip. It was lined from end to end with bars, restaurants, night clubs, high-rise apartment buildings and cheap all night eateries featuring steak for \$2.39. It was a river of light brimming with traffic from dawn to dawn. The busses were always full of people going to or coming from their jobs on the beach where three shifts had to be manned daily at this time of year.

Shayne attracted no attention. He saw two Beach detectives he knew watching the narrow bridge from Bay Harbor Islands east. In a car they'd have had him for sure, but they gave the bus only a casual glance. Once on the Beach, he took another bus South to Arthur Godfrey Road, and walked the rest of way. It was midnight by then but the streets were still full of people and the big detective was hardly noticed.

The residential streets near the Evans estate were quiet, but he took the precaution of circling the block looking for a police stakeout. There wasn't any, and it bothered Shayne. Petey Painter had headed the detective division before the City Commission made him Chief. He and Shayne had never gotten on, but they respected each other's professional ability. It was elementary procedure to leave a stakeout at the scene of a recent killing.

"He knows I'm coming," Shayne told himself. "A hundred to one there's a black light beam to tell them when I cross any part of the perimeter. By the time I got to the house there'd be twenty cops waiting."

He crossed the street and melted into the shadows among the multiple trunks of an ancient banyan tree. Inside the estate there was movement. He couldn't see the garage behind the big house, but he did hear the engine of a small car come to life. It sputtered and



coughed as if the driver was having trouble. Then its lights came on and swung down the service drive by which deliveries were made to the rear entrances.

The gate from drive to street swung open, actuated by an automatic electronic signal and switch, and the car came out and turned left towards the spot where the detective stood. As long as the headlights didn't hit him directly, he was safe so he just stood still. The car was a small, foreign "bug type" of a popular make. Its engine was still acting up as the driver tried to adjust the choke.

In the shadow cast into the street by the big tree the car was stopped and the motor alternately revved and idled. The door swung silently open and a woman's voice

said softly, "Quickly, Mr. Shayne. Get in now and they won't see you. I've got information you need to have."

The voice could have been Edith Evans'. Shayne could make out only that the driver was a woman in a white dress. On sudden impulse he moved out of the shadow and into the car. He pulled the car door to but didn't close it completely for fear of the sound it would make. The engine began to idle properly and the bug pulled smoothly away down the street.

"They were waiting for you near the house," the driver said in a pleasant, vibrant tone. It was a woman but not Edith. This one he'd never seen before as far as he could tell in the poor light.

"I was watching from a third floor window," she said. "I knew you'd be along and I was sure you wouldn't come on in where they were waiting for you. When I saw you, I brought the car out. I'm supposed to be going to an all night drug store to fill a doctor's prescription."

"You're a clever woman," he told her.

"All women are clever," she said. "It's the only way we survive. If more men were like you, we wouldn't. So you see I ought not to help you."

"Then why are you doing it?"

Instead of answering she pulled the car over to a shadowed parking spot. She was wearing a white dress

such as nurses use for uniforms. It was buttoned all down the front and she began to undo the top buttons. The detective just sat and waited.

"You are smart," she said with a hint of amusement. "I want you to take me someplace we can talk. I don't want the bartender to remember me as a nurse. So help me out of this thing, and don't have any wrong ideas."

Shayne helped her and then folded the uniform and dropped it on the car's rear seat. Under the uniform she'd worn a close-fitting, dark, sheath dress that tied around the neck from in front and left arms, shoulders, and part of her back bare. It was short, but still far from mini-length. Black, medium heel shoes to match came out of her bag. So did a strand of pearls for her neck.

Even in the dim light Shayne could see that this woman was older than Edith. She might be anywhere between forty and fifty with slim, shapely legs, smooth-swelling curves at thigh and breast and an oval, rather beautiful face. Her black hair still had a natural wave and her eyes were dark and sparkling. She wore a seductive spicy perfume.

"You can call me Alice," she began.

"Alice Porter," Shayne said. "It would have to be that."

"How did you figure that out?" She sounded genuinely surprised but she didn't forget to start the car and drive on.

"I'm a detective," Shayne said. "I've met Edith, and been told that Aunt Anita's an old maid and hates it. You could have any man you wanted, young or old."

"Why thank you," she said, reaching over and tracing a line on the back of his hand with one finger. "You could have a wide choice of women yourself, Mike Shayne. It takes one to know one, you remember. But I suppose your next question will be why I'm helping you."

"I did have that one in mind."

"Simple enough," she said. "Most women don't admit it of course, but it's always a business of something for something. I help you because you can help me."

"I scratch your back," Shayne said.

"Oh no," she said. "No. No. If you ever get that big hand on my back I'm lost." She was laughing now. "Buy me a drink, and I'll spell it all out for you. I know a quiet place we can go."

He sat quietly and let her drive. She twisted the little car through a tangle of quiet streets west of Pine Tree Drive to one of those intimate bars in which the Beach specializes. It was so dimly illuminated inside that at first he could make out no details. She must have come there often, for she could lead him quickly to a curtained and recessed booth at the far end of the room.

"I'm a brandy drinker myself,"

Shayne said when the barkeep came over.

"So am I." She named one of his favorite brands.

"Bring the bottle," Shayne said, "and a carafe of cold water and a couple of tumblers."

She smiled approval instead of correcting him in any detail. There were only a few others in the room and they were paired off, curtained from the world by their mutual desires. The bartender showed no interest at all, once he'd brought the brandy and taken Shayne's money. In any way that mattered he and Alice Porter were alone.

"I like you, Mike," she said. "If we'd met ten years back."

"We didn't," he said. "So I've got to ask you to spell out things."

They looked at each other in the half dark and drank fiery brandy from the heavy tumblers.

"How did you know I'd be back tonight?"

"You had to," she said. "When I let you take the diary with you I knew you'd come looking for the missing pages. Of course I didn't know who you were then."

Shayne, shocked, tensed and then relaxed. "When you let me?"

"I . . . Yes, I let you. I'm sorry, darling, but it was I who sapped you. Think, though—it wasn't hard. I wanted you to be able to go before the police came. You know I could have hit you much harder than I did."

Shayne stared. "My hat?"

"I left it wherever it rolled to," she said. "Believe me I was shocked when it was found in Edgar's room. I was trying to frame you for safe-robbing, Mike; not for murder. I didn't even know there'd been a murder. Did you do it, Mike? I don't think you're the kind that would kill an old man, but I have to ask. You understand?"

"I think so," Shayne said. "Right now I'm not too sure of anything except you're smart. But maybe I understand. Just one thing bothers me. How did you know I wouldn't kill you a minute ago?"

"You could have," she said. "You're armed of course—or just with those big hands of yours. You could do it with them any time. How did I know? I guess from what you did and didn't do in the car. I knew it was all right to tell you the truth."

"Who killed the old man?" Shayne got to the point.

"I don't know for sure," she said. "I think it had to be Edith, but I didn't actually see it done, if that's what you mean."

"That's part of what I meant."

"Well, then, who else could it have been? How much did Edith tell you this morning?"

"Look here, woman, you're going too fast. How did you know about Edith talking to me at all?"

"Easily enough," she laughed at him. She slid her body around the curve of the booth until she could put her head on his shoulder.

"You've heard of extension telephones. I listened on one—quite by accident I assure you—while she made the appointment. After that it wasn't too hard to guess what she'd told you. I should have remembered it when I saw you kneeling in front of the safe. If I had, I wouldn't have sapped you. I'd have known you were a reasonable man and talked things over. But I wasn't expecting to find you there."

"Yes," Shayne said. "Let's get back to the safe. Suppose you tell me all your side of that."

"We'd all been watching those stupid home movies of Carl's in the living room. I hate watching home movies. In fact I hate watching anything I should be doing instead. Edith was running the machine. At least it runs itself most of the time. All she really had to do was change the reel every twenty minutes or so."

"Right after one reel change I looked at the luminous dial of my wrist watch. It was just before nine and I was supposed to give Edgar his regular medication at that hour, so I slipped out and went upstairs. He's capable of taking the capsule himself of course, but he likes to be babied. I didn't get to his room though. From the head of the stairs I saw your flash blinking in the office. It was easy enough to sneak up to the door on that thick carpet.

"I could see you inside, kneeling in front of the safe. Lying on top of the hall table by the door was the

leather covered blackjack. I didn't stop to figure out how it got there. I guess I thought you'd laid it down while you opened the safe. I picked it up and hit you—meaning to knock you out till the cops came. Right then I didn't think you were anything except a burglar."

"The Beach cops answered your call fast," Shayne said. He pulled at his left ear lobe.

The brandy was getting to her. She slid one arm behind his shoulders and took hold of the right ear lobe with thumb and forefinger and tugged at it.

"That's fun," she said. "Oh—it wasn't my call. I went to my room extension, but I already heard the sirens. Somebody else had called. I decided to let them meet the cops, but the way it turned out everyone went to the door at once to see what the noise was about. There were two cars and the Chief was in the first one to arrive. He said there'd been a report of a safe cracking, so they all trooped upstairs. I was all ready to say I'd knocked you out, but you were gone.

"Do you always do that, Mike? Do you vanish when a girl gets interested in you, darling?"

"Don't darling me," Shayne said, looking at her. "I've got a girl."

She made a deep sound in her throat and the ivory oval of her face came up to his. "Of course you've got a girl—but this is now . . . and I'm here."

It was minutes before they pulled

apart. "I wanted to see how it will be when we have more time," she said close to his ear.

"There won't be another time unless you give me some more answers," Shayne said. "They don't like this sort of thing during visiting hours in jail. Besides there's a wire barrier."

"I'll give you any answers you want," she said. Then she sat up and poured them both some brandy.

"When did the cops find the body?"

"When the Chief went to the bedroom to ask Edgar if he'd seen or heard you. Edgar has cold hands," she said. "I hate it when he touches me. He smells sour. But it was awful to see him like that. I'm glad you didn't do it, Mike."

"Who could have sneaked out and done it besides you and Edith?" he asked.

"Any of us could, I suppose," she said. "You see, that's being honest with you."

"Yes," he said. "It certainly is. One thing more—a while back you said I'd be coming for the missing diary pages. Who has them? and what's your interest in them?"

"I don't know who has them. I suppose they prove whether little Edith is a bastard. I want to find out. Why? I'll be honest again, darling before you guess anyway. It's money. I don't want the will changed to cut out Edith because he might cut me out too. I don't want

to lose all those millions. Would you?"

"How many millions?"

"I'll tell you that another time. I've got to go now, Mike, and pick up that stupid medicine and check in before the police start wondering what's taking me so long. No, you can't talk me out of it now while I still don't know about the money. You try another time though. I can promise you one thing. You won't have to try very hard, darling. I don't meet a man like you often."

She kissed him again, then pulled herself reluctantly to the far curve of the booth.

"I'll put on my uniform in the car," she said. "The fresh air will sober me up enough to get by the cops. You just give me five minutes head start and then call a cab. Try to get in touch with me late tomorrow aft—I mean this afternoon. Don't give your name on the phone. I'll recognize your voice. By that time the cops ought to be gone and we can look for those pages together."

She got up and walked quickly out of the bar.

Shayne didn't try to follow. He knew where he could always find her, and she'd given him too much to think about. He had to get the things she said sorted out and put in relation to each other and to the other facts he already had. Above all he had to figure out which of her revelations were true, and which were lies. None of that was going

to be worked out properly while his head was still swimming.

After a while he got up and gave the barkeep a fiver to let him go out the back door and to forget he'd ever been in the place. Shayne didn't think he'd been tailed, but his profession made him naturally careful.

He took another bus back the way he'd come and checked in at a Miami motel where he knew no questions would be asked. The owner-manager owed him a favor from years back. By the time he smoked a final cigarette and got to sleep it was two o'clock. His last conscious thought was to wonder how Alice Porter had managed to put up with eight years as old Edgar Evans' mistress. He could understand why there would be quiet bars which knew her well.

IV

MIKE SHAYNE woke about eight-thirty in the morning. He hadn't had enough sleep by a long shot, but he'd had all he dared to allow himself. He had things to do that couldn't be accomplished from the bed of a motel room.

Before he was through washing up the motel owner was rapping at the door. The man had a copy of the *News*' local rival—the Miami morning paper. The story was on page one of Section B.

"Right after the War," Shayne said, "that would have been a lead story on the front page instead of

shoved back to the second section. People have more to worry about these days."

"You've got more to worry about anyway, Mike," the man said. "I've got to tell you to get out of here right away. I could lose my license."

"I know it, Charley," Shayne said. "Don't get excited. Just bring me a mug of hot black coffee and a pint of whatever brandy the package store on the corner can sell you. By the time I drink the coffee and read the paper I'll be ready to move out."

"Thanks, Mike," his friend said. "Come again when you're not in such a hurry."

The paper had given the story all the play it could manage. For years Shayne had given his exclusive stories to the *News* through Tim Rourke, and this was a chance to even the score a bit. They weren't going to waste the opportunity. There wasn't much they could do, though, outside of a screaming headline: **MIAMI DETECTIVE SOUGHT IN MURDER OF BEACH TYCOON.**"

Even that had to be softened down by the qualification that Shayne was sought "for questioning". The story contained no details the redhead didn't already know.

Shayne took off his jacket and carried it over one arm. He rolled up his shirt sleeves and left off his necktie so as to look as much as possible like a workman on the way



to a job. Instead of belt-holstering his .38 he put it in the pocket of the jacket.

The first priority problem was to find a place he could get off the streets for a while. First he sought out a pay telephone booth and called Rourke at the *News*.

"This is A. Fox," he said into the mouthpiece. "Just looking for a hole to lay my head."

Tim Rourke recognized his voice at once.

"Of course, Mr. Fox," he said. "I've been expecting your call. I've

rented temporary quarters for you at"—he named an address near N.E. Second Ave. "The key's under the door mat, so just go in. Our mutual friends have been asking for you. What do I tell them?"

"Tell Angel the number to call me at where you rented a place. As you know I'm not ready for St. Peter yet. Anybody else just say to leave a number and I'll call them. You come to see me in an hour, when I'm settled."

He hung up and walked west on 79th Street until he found a car where the owner had obligingly left his key in the ignition. It wasn't hard because people insist on being trusting.

Shayne drove south to within a couple of blocks of the address Tim had given him and parked his borrowed transportation. Five minutes later he was in the efficiency apartment. The first thing he saw, as he hoped he would, was the fully packed suitcase he left always at Rourke's office just for emergencies of the sort. There were changes of clothing, shaving equipment, a gun and a box of shells, a wallet stuffed with small bills and similar items of his personal "survival kit."

There was a phone in the apartment. Lucy Hamilton called before he was through shaving. He knew she was smart enough to call from a pay phone so they could both speak freely.

"Michael," she said, "are you all right? No more fights?"

"I'm fine," he said. "Just hungry. Otherwise fine."

"I'm relieved," she said, "I hope you got some sleep."

"I did," he said. "Alone, in case you wondered."

"Edith called twice already," Lucy said. "She's absolutely frantic to get hold of you. Says she blames herself for your being in trouble and must talk to you. She wanted to know if you had the diary. I said you hadn't said. I'd have to ask you."

"Good," Shayne said. "You don't know a thing. By the way, have you read it yourself?"

"I didn't dare take the time. It's taking the place of a package of frozen lima beans right now. I expected Will's boys looking for you. When they came it was just Lieutenant Maine and a detective. They had a warrant to look for you but nothing else. I gave my word you weren't here and all the lieutenant did was look into the living room from the front door."

"Will's a real friend," Shayne said. "Anyway you get the book out and read it through. You know what to look for; but on top of that I want a list of any pages that are torn out or missing. Call me back at this number as soon as you finish with it."

"Anything else, Michael?"

"Only one thing. Somebody connected with this caper seems to be a real bushwhacker. Don't believe any message you hear that claims

to come from me. Unless you recognize my voice, and I call you Angel twice in one sentence, don't credit anything that comes over the phone or from any one else in any way. Check?"

"Check. What do I tell Edith when she calls again?"

"Tell her to take a walk on Godfrey Road this afternoon around three. Say I'll contact her if I can. And listen, Angel, if the Evans housekeeper, Mrs. Alice Porter, calls, take down whatever she says in shorthand. Tell her you'll get the message to me, and I'll contact her. If Will Gentry calls, say I'm making progress."

He hung up and went back to shaving. After that he put on a sport jacket and slacks from the bag instead of the dark suit he'd worn the day before. He was knotting a bright bow tie around the collar of a clean white shirt when Tim Rourke knocked on the door.

"I brought a few essentials," the reporter said, setting an armful of paper bags on the kitchenette table. First of all he passed Mike Shayne a carton of black coffee and a paper bag of doughnuts and Danish pastries.

The big man pitched in hungrily.

"What's the rest of it?" Shayne asked, indicating the other bags.

"Essentials," Rourke said. "Sandwiches and sandwich makings. Instant coffee, sugar and cream. A couple of TV dinners. Bacon and eggs. Brandy and a bottle of the

laxative doctors recommend most to other doctors. What have I forgotten?"

"Only to keep your mouth shut," Shayne said. While he ate he gave Rourke a condensed account of the night's events. "You can see," he finished, "this one is complicated. Almost anybody could have done almost anything so far. As it stands I've even got to mistrust myself on the basis of the evidence."

"Alice Porter did what?" Rourke said, returning to the part of the story that impressed him the most. "All these years she's been moggling around that big house like a combination Florence Nightingale and grateful poor relation. And all the while hotter than the inside of the Sarah Lee cake oven. Of course there were the stories about Edgar, but he was so old they didn't mean a thing. Look at the woman and butter wouldn't melt in her mouth."

"Apparently she was playing for high stakes," Shayne said. "If I remember right the word she used was millions. She also said Edgar had cold hands. I guess she figured it was going to be worth it though. I want a look at that will she doesn't want torn up."

"I can't get a copy of a will," Rourke protested. "You know it isn't a matter of public record before it gets to probate court. I'll see if the power of the *News* can be used to get some judge to talk off the record, but I can't guarantee a thing."

"Better than that," Shayne said, "you go over to the Beach and talk to Petey Painter. Dangle the bait that you might be able to talk me into turning myself in. Tell him I didn't do it and I only need a little time to pin down the one who did. If he gives me another day I'll have some positive evidence."

"Come on, Mike," Rourke said. "Who really did it?"

"The evidence says I did it," Shayne said. "I know that's wrong. More evidence says my client did it. I hope that's wrong, but I don't know it is. The best case so far says she could have sneaked upstairs and bashed in Daddy's head just before I was due to show up; then phoned the fuzz to hurry on in. She'd already arranged to give me both motive and opportunity when she told me to tap the safe. All that remained was to put me to sleep with the murder weapon till Petey reeled me in."

"You mix your metaphors," Rourke said, "but regardless of that there's something else. If all that's true, why should sweet Alice come right out and admit she sapped you? In fact why should she sap you at all? She'd get what she wanted by just sitting still, or at least I'd think she could. Why bother you at all?"

"If that woman took a hand at all," Shayne said, "she'd have the same motive as Edith. No more no less. She'd only do it if she felt sure somebody else was about to change a will that she wanted kept as it

was. It would have to be more than just a threat. There'd be no point unless whoever it was had such a strong position that she felt it was just a matter of time before it succeeded. That's why I want you to do all you can to see that will. If you can't see it yourself, get somebody talking. Find out what legal firm handles or handled, that sort of detail for Evans and see if they'd just drawn a new will. Get as much as you can buy or con out of the secretaries or junior associates."

"Right, but what will you be doing?"

"I've got to go back to the Beach."

"That's sticking your head in the lion's mouth," Rourke said. "At least it is, if we promote Petey to a full sized lion."

He had opened one of the bottles he'd brought in and was drinking from the neck. Now he offered the bottle to Shayne.

Shayne brushed the bottle aside "No drink now. I've already had too many since this case started. You can bet Petey will bite like a lion if I let him once get his teeth in me. You just find out about that will."

"Who do you see first, maestro?" Rourke took the drink for Shayne.

The big detective had eaten the whole sack of Danish pastries and a couple of roast beef sandwiches and washed them down with the quart carton of hot coffee. He was beginning to feel better.

"I want to see Edith first," he told Tim Rourke. "I haven't really talked to her since the murder, and I want to ask her some questions. After that I think I'll be ready for another talk with Alice. That woman's hotter than a cast iron hitching post in the Augus sun. Now get out of here and let me get some rest."

"I'll go," Rourke said, "but you should be grateful for all this." He finished the bottle and left.

Shayne's mind was busy probing odd angles of the case. He still didn't know whose voice had warned him off the case by phone the morning before. He hadn't talked to Carl Evans or his aunt. He wished he could ask Will Gentry's help in getting certain facts that would be available to the police in their official capacity. He couldn't, of course, as long as there was an actual warrant out with his name on it. He didn't dare move slowly either. Sooner or later the Beach police would catch up with him. Once in a cell there was little he'd be able to do to help himself. He hated to think of having to rely on someone else's efforts.

He had only one more phone call that morning. It was from Lucy Hamilton. "Have you been listening to the radio news?" she began.

"No."

"You should have, Michael. Somebody found your car where you left it last night outside of Junior's Restaurant and wired a bomb to the

ignition. About an hour ago a young man tried to steal the car, using a master key like the ones you have. When he turned on the ignition the bomb killed him. Police say both the bombing and the theft look like professional jobs. They're looking for you."

"I'm sure they are. Anything else?"

"Your friend Alice called. She asked me if I was your girl friend, and when I dodged the question congratulated me. Then she said for you to see her this evening. She says she's found out something that's too hot to hold. She'll be watching the back of the estate for you. The Beach police aren't in the house any longer. Come as soon as you can."

"I have to see Edith first," Shayne said. "Then I'll try to get to her."

"You do that, Michael, but just remember—be careful."

"I never forget, Angel. I never forget."

When he hung up the receiver Shayne wasn't feeling nearly as jaunty as he'd tried to sound. Somebody'd hired a professional to wire his car. He must be getting close to an answer for it to be worth while having him killed. On the other hand that didn't sound like either of the two women.

Ordinarily it would take a man with ample funds and local underworld connections to arrange that sort of contract killing. Still, Alice Porter might have gotten plenty of cash from old Edgar over the years,

and if she had gotten around enough on her nights out who knew what sort of connections she could have formed?

He used public transportation to get back on the Beach again. The killer would lack resources to watch the bus lines and he didn't think the police would bother. He was right on both counts.

It wasn't hard to locate Edith Evans window shopping on the road. He hailed a cab and took her over to a Collins Avenue hotel bar where the booths offered a maximum of privacy, and the tourist patrons cared only for their own affairs.

"Who left the living room last night while the movies were being shown?" was his first question.

She surprised him. "I guess we all did. That is, all but Aunt Anita. I think she dozed right through the whole thing. I went out of the room twice. Once, right after the first reel, I went to unlock the back door for you. The second time was a couple of reels later when I just went to the lavatory on the ground floor. Later on I saw Carl coming back into the room.

"I hadn't seen him leave and don't know where he'd been, but why should anybody suspect him? Just before we all heard the police sirens I saw Alice Porter in the hall. I didn't notice her go out or when she came back. I'm afraid that's not much help, but it's the best I can do."

"That's a lot of help," Shayne said. "You try to remember more if you can. Now—what do you know about any missing pages in your Mother's diary? When did you read the diary last?"

"I never read it at all, only parts years ago, and I don't know what you're talking about—missing pages. I never heard anybody speak of those things. What pages are missing?"

"I don't know."

"Didn't you read the diary? You did get it, didn't you?"

"I'd rather not say right now," Shayne said. "The police can't get anything out of you that you haven't found out yet. Just remember, though, I haven't had much time for reading lately. Now the most important thing. Did you ever see the new will your father said he was having drawn up?"

"No. Honestly, Mike, I never read it."

"What did he say was going into it? Try hard to remember."

"I'll try, but it wasn't much. Father was old, and naturally close-mouthed about such things all his life. He said he knew now I wasn't really his child. If I was I couldn't have done the things to him that I'd been doing."

"Hold it there," Shayne said, "what did he mean by that? It could be important."

"I don't know what he meant. I asked him, but he said I already knew, so why repeat things? He said



all the impostaers and thieves were going to be cut out of the will. He was tired of being robbed and lied to. Mother had got away with betraying him, but he'd see to it that nobody else ever did. I suppose he meant Alice Porter, I guess. I'd been away so much."

"I thought you lived here," Shayne said.

"I do. Only sometimes living here and being here aren't exactly the same thing. I went away to college the year before Mother died, you know. Then there's been work for a

graduate degree. And last year I was studying art in Switzerland. Between that and vacation trips and visiting friends I don't suppose I've actually spent two full weeks at a time in Miami for years and years. Besides I haven't wanted to be around too much."

"You mean Alice Porter?"

"I guess maybe I do. Oh, she's always been nice to me. Nothing out of line. Actually I think I like her. But in some ways it isn't easy seeing somebody like her take the place of your mother. Not when a family's been close. Oh—you know."

"I guess I do," Shayne said. "How about your brother? Has there been any change in the relationship between you two?"

She shrugged off his offer of another drink. "How could there be? Somehow or other there's never been enough of what you'd call a relationship for it to change. Carl's only my half brother, almost old enough to be my father. I think he resented my mother taking the place of his. He only seems to care about the business and the property. He manages everything since Father got so old. At times I feel like the rest of us were just pieces of property in his eyes, or maybe clerks in the office. He knew we were there, but he never really cared."

"Has he ever been married?" Shayne asked, "or had any hobbies or interests or love affairs? Anything like that?"

"Not that I know of, Mike. He

goes across the Bay to the offices of Evans Enterprises. That's the holding company that controls all the family properties. He goes out of town sometimes on business trips. When he's home he's always polite and kind to us all, but never what you could call loving. He never really seems to care."

"What would a new will do for him?" Shayne asked.

"I suppose he'd get what had been my share as well as his own. I don't really know. We always just assumed everything would be divided equally between us; except for bequests—maybe big ones to Aunt Anita and Mrs. Porter, that is. Why don't you ask him, Mike? If anyone would have seen a new will it would be him or Alice Porter. Anyway I'd think so."

"Maybe I will ask him," the detective said. "I'd rather ask the lawyers who drew it up. Do you know who they'd be?"

"Our family firm has always been Morton and Greene," she said. "Lately Carl's been using other firms too for business matters. I think one of them is Carrol and Carson."

Shayne made no comment on that, but it surprised him. Buck Carson, one of the partners, was known to him as a specialist in criminal law.

"Has Carl any weaknesses?" he asked. "Anything you might call a vice? Liquor? Women? Anything abnormal?"

"I don't think so," she answered.

"No—wait a minute. Years ago before Mother died I heard her talking to Father about Carl's gambling. I don't remember any details except they were both very serious. I don't think he gambles any more, though, if he ever really did. Why?"

"I'm just gathering facts," Shayne said. "All the facts I can get. Maybe after a while they'll fit together like a jigsaw puzzle and make a picture I can read. Edith, why would you have wanted the old man dead?"

She looked straight into his face. "I want Father dead? I wouldn't."

"The police can say his dying before he signed a new will would make you rich. They could say you had motive and opportunity."

"But nobody can prove I hit him with that thing, because I didn't. I didn't."

"If they convict me," Shayne said bitterly, "and then prove you asked me to rob the safe and left the door open for me they can convict you for conspiracy to murder or even accessory after the fact. Legally you'd be as guilty as me." He made no reference to the fact she'd referred to the murder weapon as "that thing" as if she knew what it was that had been used.

Her face was white. For the first time she noticed the drink on the table in front of her. She drank it at one draught. "Did you do it, Mike? Did he surprise you?"

"Of course not," Shayne said. "Even Petey Painter will know that when he stops to use his brains. If

I'd been surprised by the old man at the safe and killed him there, do you think I'd have taken the body down the hall and tucked it back in bed? Do you think I could have done it without leaving a trail of blood all the way after his head was beaten all out of shape?"

She kept looking at him. "Then what—why?"

"What am I worried about? That's easy. They could still make a case. Suppose they claim your father heard me and called out for help, and I heard him and went to the bedroom to kill him so as to shut him up? Actually of course I'd just have taken the diary and gone out the way I came in. How could I prove that? Of course I couldn't."

"Then you could have killed him, Mike?"

"I could," Shayne said. "You could. Anyone in the house could. With the back door open the way it was anyone on Miami Beach could have come in and done it. My problem is to find out who did."

"I didn't," she said.

"Nor did I," Shayne assured her. "You go on home now and try to remember more facts I can use. Anything you think of or find out, phone the details to my secretary. I'll keep in touch with her. Don't say anything at all to the police without your own lawyer being present. Be sure of that."

When she left the bar Shayne finished his drink and ordered another. Then he went to the public

phone booth in the entrance lobby.

His first call was to Lucy Hamilton.

"You must be making a fine mousetrap, Michael," she said. "People have been beating a path to your door all day. I managed to keep my cool though."

By the last he knew none of the items in her freezer had been found.

"That's fine, Angel," he said. "What can you tell me about missing pages from a certain book?"

"I don't know how you guessed about those," she said, "but there are gaps, and they make it look bad for your client. There's one page missing just thirty-two weeks before Edith was born. I can get you the date. It was Saturday and a big ball had been planned. Then there are two pages gone the twenty-ninth week before her birth, one the twentieth week and one the eighteenth. The day of her birth is blank of course, but the three days following are gone. So are two pages about three weeks later. All the missing pages have been neatly cut out with a sharp knife or a razor blade."

"Yeah," Shayne said, "nicely timed to indicate some sort of references to an affair."

"Has it occurred to you, Michael," Lucy said, "that they're almost too nicely timed?"

"Of course it has, Angel," Shayne said. "Those pages could be full of nothing more damning than fish fries and hair-do's. It's

their not being there to read that makes them a factor. I'm beginning to think they didn't really cause the killing though. Anyway you sit tight. I'm going to try to get into the house again."

"Be careful, Michael," was all she said.

The next call Shayne made was to Tim Rourke at his office. "What've you got on that will?" he asked.

"Not too much," Rourke answered. "In fact not much at all. The old man's lawyers were Morton and Greene, a good reputable firm. In fact so damn reputable I can't find a way to make them talk. One of their junior members, Lance Shewalter, owes me a favor. I got him out of a mess with a French Quarter dancer when he was still in law school. I put the heat on him till he sizzled, I can promise you. Even at that he wouldn't talk, at least not enough to be of any real help."

"You let me be the judge of that," Shayne said. "Just repeat anything he did say."

"Don't be toplofty, maesrto," Rourke said. "Whose contact is this anyway? Well, he did admit there was a new will, though he wouldn't say if it had actually been signed. Maybe he didn't know. The thing was handled by old Alto Greene, and I think Lance has to salute every time they meet in the washroom. Anyway there was almost a signing about three months ago.

Lance says it didn't come off, though he's not sure why.

"Additions or revisions, he thinks. For the last few weeks all the conferences have gone on in Edgar's bedroom on the Beach, and when Greene brings papers back they're locked in his personal office safe. He thinks another signing actually took place or was only scheduled for this week. Nobody confided in him and it's really none of his business."

"I see," Shayne said.

"One thing that might interest you, Mike. He swears he never saw the will, and I think I believe him, but you know there's always a lot of gossip in a big office like that. He said whatever was in the will, it must be a scorcher. If I wanted it for the front page, I'd have to get it from somebody else. He didn't dare risk his job by telling me. Sounded like he meant it too. I hope that helps."

"It might," Shayne said. "Did he say anything about Carl being in on the deal."

"Absolutely not. He said Edgar was doing this all by himself. His whole firm had orders not even to give the time of day if anyone else in the family asked. Oh, he said Carl came in a couple of weeks ago and was closeted with Alto for an hour. The secretary outside the door told the other girls she could hear them yelling at each other but did not make out what they said."

"Secretaries should have better

ears," Shayne said. "Thanks a lot, Tim. You've been a big help. I'm going into the house to see Alice again in a little while. You see if you can dig up anything about Carl gambling around town. Anything you can find—particularly who he's been losing to, and how much."

"Will do," Rourke said. "Did Carl do it, Mike?"

"I don't know," Shayne said. "When I do have an answer, you'll be the first to know."

V

SHAYNE STILL had a couple of hours to kill before he wanted to try the Evans house again. He spent them in places well off his usual beat and where the police wouldn't expect to find him. His dinner was in a typical tourist-trap steakhouse. The place was small and the prices so high he wasn't afraid of finding any of Painter's men eating there.

It was already dark by the time he finished eating. Shayne lit a strong Havana cigar and walked South and then west towards the Bay.

He hadn't gone two blocks on the road before he sensed that he was being followed. The indefinable personal radar which long years in his profession had alerted him long before he could pick up the tail.

It was a quiet little man who kept almost a full block in the rear. He was carrying a paper shopping bag holding some concealed object.

Shayne was almost sure that would be a compact walkie-talkie and that the man's principals would already have been alerted.

Only one question remained in Shayne's mind. Were those principals the police or the unknowns who'd booby-trapped his car during the night? There was only one way to find out and that was to let them come up with him.

The big detective crossed the street and turned south on one of the quiet residential roads back of the line of shops, bars, restaurants and boutiques. He gave no evidence of knowing he was followed. The little man stayed well behind him.

The car came out of a side street a couple of blocks ahead and turned north, the driver timing himself to intercept Shayne at a corner. He swung left to block the detective at the curb. There were two other men in the car, one in the front seat and one in the back. All three would have been at home in any cheap bar or poolroom in the city.

The man beside the driver did the talking.

"Police," he said gruffly. "Climb in back, Shayne. Chief Painter wants to see you."

"What if I don't want to see him?" Shayne said.

He knew most of the Beach detectives by sight, but this trio were strangers.

"You want it the hard way, Shayne?" the man in front asked. "Okay. You can have it. Get out

and put the cuffs on him, Harry."

He backed his words by raising a sawed-off double barrelled twelve gauge shotgun from the seat beside him and resting the stubby foreend on the door top so the twin muzzles were less than eighteen inches from Shayne's chest.

The one in the back seat was Harry. He climbed out the far side, circled the rear of the car and came up behind Mike Shayne.

"Just hold your hands clear of your body while I frisk you, bud," he said without emotion.

At that moment a citizen walking a pair of miniature poodles came down the side street.

"What's the trouble over there?" he called out, apparently not seeing the shotgun.

"Police business," the man in the front seat told him. "Nothing for you to be upset about."

Shayne changed all that. He spun clean around to the left so that his outstretched left hand chopped Harry's neck and threw him off balance.

The talkative one in the front seat reacted all wrong. He instinctively pulled both triggers of the gun and succeeded in blowing out both of Harry's lungs. Shayne's swerve had pulled him out of the line of fire.

The big detective continued his spin around as fast as a ballet dancer. He got both hands on the lapels of the gunner's jacket and started to drag him bodily over the car door. The dog-walking citizen was scream-

ing bloody murder and the wail of a prowler car somewhere close told Shayne the shots would be investigated.

The car driver heard it too and slammed the accelerator to the floor. The souped-up car jumped away from the curb. Shayne still had the gunner in a tight grip. The man came halfway over the door. Then his belt must have snagged on the handle. He stopped coming. Shayne, pulled to his knees, let go and tumbled into the gutter.

The driver, scared, shaved the rear of a parked car down the street. The gunner, flopping and clawing air, wasn't that lucky. His head hit metal with a sound like somebody using a sledge hammer on a coconut. He'd never shoot another man.

Shayne scrambled to his feet and ran. He had to be long gone before the prowler car got there. The poodle, released by its horrified owner, came with him, yapping its joyous appreciation of the whole thing.

Shayne liked dogs, but not enough to want this one advertising his progress. Once around the corner he paused long enough for the beast to come pounding up, caught it in one big hand and lofted it, leash and all, into the tangled branches of a Brazilian pepper. The dog's happy cries changed to screams of outrage as it scrambled and tried to get down.

Shayne made straight for the

Evans estate. With the whole area due to be combed over by Beach police in a matter of minutes, he had nothing to lose by direct action. He got over the wall and into the sheltering shrubbery seconds before the first prowler car howled by with its spotlight raking the street.

It was dark already and Shayne was in some doubt as to how he could contact Alice Porter. She'd "be watching the back of the place," but just what did that mean? Finally he made his way to the edge of the shrubbery at a point that should be visible from almost the entire rear of the house. Without leaving cover, he flipped on the flame of his cigarette lighter for three brief flashes, and then shifted his position somewhat and continued to watch the house. There were lights on the first and second floors but everything seemed quiet.

He needn't have worried. He'd hardly had time to get settled before a side door to the garage opened and a dark figure came purposefully across the lawn to a spot opposite where he'd flashed the light.

"Mike?" said a low voice.

Shayne stepped out. It was Alice Porter, wearing a dark blouse and slacks. She took his hand and led him back the way they'd come. From the garage a door opened into the kitchen wing and another into the body of the house. Alice took the first.

"I sent the servants out for the



day and evening," she explained. "They were too shaken up by the killing yesterday to do any work."

They went up a back stairway to the second floor hallway. Her room was at the end of the wing next to the one the murdered man had used. It was large and luxuriously furnished—certainly not a servant's quarters. There were a private bath and dressing room.

Once safely inside she closed and locked the door. Only one small bulb was burning in a bedside lamp. Heavy drapes had been drawn across the windows.

In the semi-darkness she turned with a swift, fluid motion and put her arms around him. She kissed him full in the mouth. Her lips were hot, and he could feel her breasts harden under the thin blouse.

"No, Mike," she said, "no, — we've got time."

"You may," he said. "I don't. Somebody's tried to kill me twice already today." He told her about the bombing and the thugs.

When he finished she took her arms away from him, but left her

body pressing close. "Who was it, Mike?"

"The same one who killed the old man," Shayne said. "Now what was the news worth my coming over to hear?"

"The old man signed a new will a week ago," she said. "I knew that. What I didn't know until today was that one was torn up, and he was to sign another today, one I didn't know about and hadn't seen."

"How did you find out?"

"I listen at keyholes and extension phones, if you must know. Like the rest of this happy family I find out things any way I can."

"How do you find out things from Carl?"

"You know how, Mike. Once in a while he gets to spend a night in here. Then he talks. What you won't believe, dear—he has cold hands too. I think I hate him the worst of any of them."

"Maybe you should," Shayne said. "Now tell me what this new will said."

"I can't. I don't know. Honestly I don't. I heard Carl mention it on the phone and that's absolutely all I know. The one that was torn up a week ago I did read. Because old Edgar showed it to me. He couldn't hold out when I wanted to know something. Besides he left me a lot in that will and he wanted me to know it. Believe me, Mike, as long as that will was on record I wouldn't harm a hair of his head."

"The police could say you were in a hurry to get your share."

"Look at me, Mike. Am I that kind? Would I be stupid enough to think I could get away with killing him with that will waiting to point a finger right at me? The family was going to challenge that part of it anyway. Edgar was old and couldn't last long. I needed to have him die a natural death, without any chance at all I could be suspected of anything. I'm no rose, Mike Shayne and never claimed to be one, but I'm neither greedy nor stupid enough to have murdered that man. You have to believe me."

"Maybe I do," Shayne said. "God knows I want to." He walked over and picked up the phone on the bedside table and dialed a Miami number.

"Mike," she said. "Anybody can listen in. It may be bugged."

"I know," he said grimly. "I know. But this call has to be made. Time's running out and I need only one thing now to break this case."

The voice that answered the phone was Will Gentry's. Shayne had called the special, unlisted phone that rang at his desk in the Chief's office at Miami Police Headquarters. When he heard Shayne call his name he came alert.

"For God's sake, Mike, where are you? What's going on? Painter really thinks he's got you this time—and for once he may be right."

"He could be, Will, if you don't do something for me and do it

fast. Get Greene of Morton and Greene, the lawyers. Tell him you have to have copies of the will Evans tore up recently and the new one he was going to sign. Tell him they're material evidence in the murder, which they are. If he still won't give, get old Judge Barabas to give you a court order. The judge trusts you. When you get those wills phone me."

"Phone you where? Where are you, Mike?"

"I'm in the Evans home on the Beach."

"You've lost your mind, you big ape. Painter's sure to have that wire bugged."

"I'm counting on it, Will. If he's stupid enough not to, you call him anyway and tell him where I am. Tell him I'll surrender to him or any one of his officers I know and recognize. To nobody else."

"I see." The Miami Chief's voice was serious. "Somebody's got you trapped in there?"

"I'm sure of it, Will," Shayne said. "I only hope whoever it is is monitoring this call. There've been two tries at killing me today. The next few minutes are the murderer's last chance. I just want him to know I'm armed and waiting. If he tries again, somebody will be dead for sure, and I don't think it'll be me."

"Hang up, Mike. I'll have the Beach men there in a hurry. I'll call you when I get the dope on the wills." The line went dead.

Alice Porter took a little, silvered

.32 automatic out of the drawer of the bedside table, and looked at Shayne. "Can you trust me to use this on your side, Mike? Old Edgar gave it to me for protection."

"Trust or no trust doesn't matter." Shayne said. "Those little pop-guns won't stop a sick kitten. Put it under your pillow and turn that reading lamp on. Pretend to be reading in bed."

She passed him the silver decanter from the table.

"It's gin," she said. "Sometimes I needed it to sleep. Help yourself."

Shayne took a long drink. It burned mouth and gullet and set fire to his stomach. One drink was enough. He took his .45 automatic out of the holster. In his hand it didn't look like a big gun. Then he pulled a chair against the wall where it would be behind the opening door if anyone came in. From that position he could keep an eye on the windows.

Alice Porter took a book and stretched out on the coverlet. They waited.

The police came first. To give Chief Painter credit he could move fast and with professional skill when he wanted. The estate was surrounded by an army of men without a spotlight or a siren to tip off anyone inside. Only then did the nattily dressed little Chief bring two car-loads of men to the front door of the house.

The detectives tried every door till they found the room where

Shayne was waiting. He handed Painter his gun with a wry grin and let himself be taken down to the living room on the first floor where the rest of the family were gathering.

Chief Painter was a small, expensively dressed man with the rapid intensity of speech and movement which so many unduly self-important men employ. He and Shayne had been not too friendly rivals for a good many years.

"For once in your life you've shown some real sense," Painter said. "Or did you give yourself up just because you knew I had you this time?"

"I'm sorry to disappoint you, Chief," Shayne said, "only I haven't given myself up. I've no reason to. I didn't do anything."

Peter Painter stopped pacing the room as if he'd run head-on into an invisible wall.

"What!" he said. "What do you mean didn't do anything? We can book you on a choice of homicide charges." He ticked off his fingers. "Murder of Edgar Evans. Killing of two men on the street not thirty minutes ago. Breaking and entering. Conspiracy to commit murder—"

Shayne interrupted him. "I'm glad you included conspiracy. I'm not guilty, but at least it shows you recognize somebody else may be involved. You've no proof I killed Evans. I never saw him in my life. Your only motive would be I'd kill him to avoid being found in a

house where I came by invitation of a member of the family—which takes care of the B and E rap too. You know I wouldn't do that. So would any jury. As for the two hoods your boys scraped off the street just now, they killed each other. Your own witness will confirm that when you calm him down. So why don't you show some common sense?"

"Look here," Painter said angrily, "if you're as innocent as all this why've you been running like a scared rabbit for twenty-four hours? Why did you have Will Gentry tip me you were here? What—"

"I've always got a reason for anything I do," Shayne said. "I wanted you all here so we could get this wound up before you had a nervous breakdown chasing me, and before anybody else got hurt."

"Someday," Painter said, "someday, Shayne you're going to go too far. You're going to stick your neck out right under the knife and no miracle is going to save you. By God, I think you've done it this time. Whatever you say had better be good is all I can say. Now who killed Mr. Evans—that is who do you want us to think did it instead of you?"

"I don't want you to believe anything except the truth," Shayne said. "Just quiet down a minute, and give me a chance to—"

There was the grinding squeal of a car on the driveway—sounds of a conference with the men guarding

the door, and Tim Rourke burst into the room. Painter swung towards him.

Rourke didn't hesitate. He picked a comfortable seat on one of the big divans where he could see all that went on.

"Sorry I'm late," he told Painter. "Will Gentry had trouble finding me on the phone to tell me you were all here for tea. Go ahead. Don't mind me."

Painter looked as if he wanted to say something forceful, but choked back the words.

Shayne said, "Hello, Tim. Glad you made it. I think Petey wants to throw you out, but he knows the power of the press. I was just about to wrap this up."

"Damn it, Mike," Painter said, "get on with it. Supposing you didn't kill the old man. What're you doing in this case anyway?"

"I was getting to that. To begin with I was hired by Edith Evans to recover something that belonged to her. Then I had to prove myself innocent of a crime I couldn't and wouldn't have committed. Since early this morning, when the first of two attempts was made on my life, I've also been trying to stay alive. Those ought to be reasons enough.

"The motive behind this killing has to be greed. The clues have to be found in a series of wills which Edgar Evans signed or ordered prepared for signature in the past few months. I haven't seen them yet,

but I can tell you just about what each contained. They will point inevitably to the murderer, who might be any one of the family sitting here tonight."

"I'm warning you to be careful what sort of accusations you make," Painter said. "These are all responsible people."

"By responsible you mean rich, of course," Rourke said. "Don't worry about it, Petey. Anything Mike says he'll make stick."

"There'll be an original will dividing the balance of the Evans millions between Carl and Edith," Shayne said with confidence. "A couple of years back that will have been amended to assign a substantial amount to Alice Porter. That one should have been it until recently. Some time ago one of the three persons named, Edith or Carl Evans or Alice Porter, got greedy. He or she wanted more than the will provided and knew that time was running out—Edgar Evans was close to death from natural causes.

"Since the greedy person gave Evans information that made him doubt his paternity of Edith, it was probably Carl."

"I didn't kill him," Carl protested.

"I'm not talking about killing yet," Shayne said. "All in due time. I say you were the one who first cast doubts on Edith's paternity. It worked with the old man. You got access to Inez Evans' diary—all of you had the combination for the safe—and tore out certain pages

to make it look as if Inez had been hiding guilty secrets. Old Edgar was gullible as people his age are. He drew a new will dividing Edith's share between you and Alice Porter. I'd guess she got at least a couple of million.

"Everything would have been fine for you, if it had stopped there, but it didn't. The old man stayed suspicious. He investigated everyone around him. He admitted as much to Edith when he said he was being robbed and cheated. He must have found what he thought was evidence you'd been managing the family properties to your own advantage rather than his. He may even have found that you and Alice were having an intermittent affair."

"My lawyers will hold you accountable for every word of this criminal libel," Carl told him, his thin lips set.

"You may have other work for them," Shayne said. "In any case you got word that a new will was being drawn. You didn't know what was in it, but you were afraid of its effect on your own prospects. You went to see your father's lawyers and fought with them, but they wouldn't tell what you wanted to know. If that new will was signed, you saw disaster ahead. Will number three could ruin you."

"Alice Porter wasn't afraid of the third will. For one thing Edgar had told her the second will hadn't been torn up. For another he must have assured her she'd be taken care of

whatever happened. He needed her as nurse, companion and assistant. Besides I think he knew she might be tempted to take his life if she were completely cut out."

"That's what she did," Carl said. "She found out and—"

"She was too smart to kill him," Shayne said. "She told me herself she'd be the first suspected, and the rest of you would try to break any will that favored her. If she knew she was cut out, Alice would have had opportunity and motive of a sort."

"That's what grand juries indict on," Tim Rourke said from his seat on the couch.

"Not enough motive," Shayne said. "As long as there was no will in existence naming her she had no legal right to inherit anything at all. She wasn't his wife. Until she knew what the new will did for her and it was signed she had every reason to keep Edgar alive, not kill him. If he died intestate, she'd had it."

Painter got up and walked back and forth.

"Where's this getting us?" he asked. "Do you say the murderer was Carl?"

"I haven't said yet," Shayne said. He was wondering when Chief Gentry would call, and he could learn how much of his reasoning was correct. "There's still Edith to think about."

"You can't suspect me," Edith said. "He'd cut me out and besides

I knew nothing about any third will, let alone it's being torn up. Someone was trying to kill me anyway. The snake—”

“You put the snake in your own room as a red herring, or at least you could have,” Shayne said. “It’s the sort of weapon a woman would think of. You knew there was practically no danger anyway. A coral snake has such a small mouth it can’t get its fangs into anything but a little finger or lip. You’re Florida bred and knew that. All you had to do was drop the snake on the rug and beat it to death with the poker.”

“Ridiculous,” she said. “Did I try to have you killed too? Why did I hire you, if I was going to kill?”

“You probably didn’t know you were going to kill,” Shayne said. “You hired me just as you said, to put you back in the will. Then when you got back here you looked in the safe to be sure the diary was where I could find it. You saw Edgar’s notes on the third will and knew you couldn’t afford to have it found. In the afternoon you bought the murder weapon, probably at a pawn shop. The police will trace it.”

“Where is that weapon?” Painter yelled at him. “Have you got it? Damn you, Shayne.”

“Let’s just say I know where it is,” Shayne said. “Edith slipped out of the darkened living room and killed the old man. She left the weapon near the safe. Then she waited till she was sure I was in the



house and called the police. She was your anonymous tipster. She was sure I’d be found. Alice spoiled that. She sapped me when she thought I was a burglar, so she didn’t hit hard. I got out of here fast.”

“Did Edith try to have you killed?” Tim Rourke asked.

“She wouldn’t have had the right connections,” Shayne said. “I think that was Carl. He’s been around this town long enough to know his way around and had the money to hire contract men. Once I was dead anything I’d found out died with me. I’d be the perfect patsy for the murder, because I couldn’t defend myself. All the family skeletons could be buried with me. He may even have thought I did kill his

Father and just not wanted me talking on a witness stand. He couldn't be sure how much I knew."

"Mike," Edith said, "what are you doing to me? I didn't kill Father. I had no real reason to. Carl yes, but not me."

"Wrong," Shayne said. "It only stands to reason you stood to gain more by murder than anyone else. State law made you an equal heir with Carl as long as the will number three had been torn up and no new one signed. This was your chance at millions. After reading and tearing up Edgar's notes, you knew it."

She hid her face in her hands and sobbed.

"I'm sorry," Shayne said.

"All this is fine," Painter said. "if your reasoning about all these wills is correct."

"The phone will ring in a few minutes," Shayne said. "You answer it, Petey. It will be Will Gentry, and he'll tell you I was substantially right. He's getting the documents from Edgar's lawyers right now with a court order."

At that moment the telephone rang. Mike Shayne smiled as Peter Painter walked over to lift up the receiver.



Read: In the JUNE issue:

DEATH WALKS HERE

The New MIKE SHAYNE Short Novel

by BRETT HALLIDAY

We are particularly fortunate, in our next issue, to be able to feature one of the most dynamic Mike Shayne novels to come from Brett Halliday's gifted pen in a long time. This time the craggy-jawed redhead manages to get himself in a three-way joust with death dealers, each of whom has one last burning goal—to gun down Mike Shayne before morning! Don't miss the gripping novel!

RUB THE WRONG WAY

by
PAUL FELDER



When a cop runs head on into a crime no law can touch—don't bet your wad on the bad guy!

KAVANAH, the retired cop, said, "A good cop learns there's times to shut his eyes to a fracture of the law."

"Sure," I said. "Those are the breaks of the game. I don't blame the cop on the beat for overlooking it when a car belonging to a councilman double-parks."

"I don't mean it that way," Kavanah said.

"Then how do you mean it?" I said.

"Like there was the time," Kavanah said, "I was walking my beat—acres of nothing but vacant lots and always a haze from the smoke of dumping—and I spotted the payoff man from the mob. It wasn't just an accident, my spotting him. Once a week he drove by that way at that time. And razzed me.

"I knew where he was heading—to hand over the top protection money to the political boss. This payoff guy got a kick out of throw-

ing his weight around, though he was nothing but a glorified messenger boy, and before this I had run-ins with him.

"The older cops told me the score and advised me to play it smart. But I couldn't help it; this guy just rubbed me the wrong way. And every once in a while, even after the word got passed down to me, I'd catch him breaking a law and I'd haul him in. But he'd always get off. And then they gave me this graveyard beat.

"He knew about that, of course, and he'd come out of his way to burn me up by whizzing past in that snazzy car. The one thing he was most scared of was being hijacked of the payoff money. The big boys don't take any excuses, you know. But he was playful. He just couldn't keep from looking up his old friend—me. He'd whiz by, way over the speed limit, and razz me with his horn.

"But I had decided to take the advice of the hair bags and play it smart. I would just nod pleasantly and go on my way, walking my beat. But I made it my business to know every inch of it, every twist and turn. You never can tell when knowing something will come in handy. Like remembering once when I told him to turn out his pockets. He closed his manicured hands into fists, then he looked in my eyes and unclosed his hands. I looked at the stuff he turned out—more folding money than I made in a year, a couple pair of dice, a valve cap, a little

black book with a lot of initials and figures, photos of dames, a nice-smelling handkerchief.

"Well, like I say, I spotted him this day, raising dust a long way off. I saw him tear through a full stop sign. I didn't blow my whistle. I saw him tear through another. I still didn't blow my whistle or try to wave him down. Then he was whizzing past, razzing me with his horn. I just nodded pleasantly, holding my breath against the dust.

"A second later I heard him braking to a rubber-burning stop. I turned. He had just missed crashing into a detour sign. He backed up and then turned and went the way the arrow pointed, onto a cobblestone road littered with nails and broken glass—

"Kavanah," I said in horror.

"Yeah?" he said.

"You're not going to tell me," I said, "you tricked the man into plunging into a quarry or a pit or something of the kind?"

"Nah," Kavanah said. "I didn't do anything like that."

"Good," I said.

"Thesre wasn't anything like a quarry or a pit anywhere around," Kavanah said.

"No," Kavanah said, "what I did was, when a tire of his car blew out and he bounced to a stop, I walked up to him and said, "I'll change your tire, Mr. Bell!"

"I guess you're learning, Kavanah," he said. But he watched me close while he handed me the key

and while I opened the trunk and took the jack and the spare and while I jacked up the car and took off the flat and put on the spare and while I put the jack and the spare in the trunk and locked it and handed him the key. Only when I wiped the sweat off my face and put my coat back on did he relax and take his hand away from his shoulder holster. "Yep Kavanah," he said, "I guess you're learning."

"Then he laughed and drove off, burning up the road."

"Kavanah, why?" I said. "Why? No, I refuse to believe you did that, humbled yourself before a punk like that."

"Don't sound so heartbroken," Kavanah said. "I knew the place he hid the payoff money—a hundred grand, I bet—was between the inner tube and the tire casing of the spare. Why else would that manicurist's de-

light carry a valve cap in his pocket? He hid the dough that way in case of a hijacking attempt. When he got to the boss's he would deflate the tube and take out the dough."

"Well," I said, "even if all that was so, I still don't see why you had to demean yourself."

"You don't?" Kavanah said. "Look, ever hear of a thing called friction?"

"Of course," I said. "You said it yourself—he rubbed you the wrong way. But—"

"Ah," Kavanah said. "Look, by the time that car rolled a few miles the payoff money in the spare would be rubbed to powder. You think the big boys would believe that story about the flat and my helping him change the tire? Nah. I broke up the detour sign and buried it in ashes and then went on walking my beat."



Next Month:

KILL BY NIGHT

A Thrilling New Novelet

by JAMES O'CONNOR SARGENT

Conceived in infamy, spawned in fear, an army of death merchants, headed by Scarface Al Capone, held Chicago in servitude. A thousand men died during that time, the word LAW was a dirty name, and a punk from Brooklyn who held life and death power over a once proud city. Here is the concluding installment of Al Capone's rise and fall and a city's incredible blood bath.

THE FALL OF AL "SCARFACE" CAPONE: AMERICA'S MOST INFAMOUS GANGSTER

by DAVID MAZROFF

THE RISE THAT LED TO THE FALL

AL CAPONE was brought to Chicago by Johnny Torrio to act as a bodyguard for Big Jim Colisimo, boss of the first ward, known as Little Italy. A man with no conscience, no scruples, no remorse, he committed the ultimate in crimes. He killed the man he was hired to protect on orders from Torrio, became Torrio's righthand man, and then plotted to overthrow Torrio and to take over Chicago as the king of the underworld.

In the terrible, chilling days that followed after Colisimo's murder Capone began the organization of *The Combination*, as it was then

called, and recruited a hundred hoods, gunmen, and killers and welded them into the most fearsome gang America has known. Not even the infamous Murder, Inc. cut-throats could be said to rival it.

Six years later, after the murder of Colisimo, Torrio was shot and seriously wounded by three men, part of the Dion O'Bannion mob. Torrio, fearful for his life, turned everything over to Capone and fled the city in the dead of night under heavy guard.

Capone now thrust his genius for organization, his bent for the extermination of all rivals to his am-

A True Crime Story of the Roaring Twenties



bitious desire for complete rule of Chicago, and ordered Jack McGurn to kill, kill, kill every member of the O'Bannion, Bugs Moran, and Aiello mobs.

Murderous McGurn went about his task of murder with the same zest a hungry man has for his first meal after a long fast. Capone urged him on to more killings, to do away with all opposition. McGurn needed no urging. And so the bloody days moved on in a sort of macabre and bizarre nightmare as bodies were thrown out of moving cars, dumped into ditches, weighted with lead and iron and tossed into the Chicago River or buried in lime pits.

This is the way it was as Capone took over the third largest city in the United States.

Even after he was in full control of the Windy City the blood bath was not yet done. Jack McGurn was a stalking demon, searching out the remaining mobsters of the three gangs while they hid from him, fearful, walking in shadows, running, running, running, but only to the end of their lives.

It ended, however, as only it could end for Al Capone, the bum from Brooklyn, who wrote his own epitaph the moment he got off the train from New York with a gun in his hand.

THE FALL OF AL CAPONE

WITH JOHNNY TORRIO out of the picture, Al Capone now was in full control of the Syndicate, master of

an organized gang of skilled hoodlums, gangsters, and killers numbering some two hundred men. After Torrio was released from prison, driven to Indiana and put on a train for New York, Capone and Jack McGurn talked about taking Hymie Weiss, leader of the North Side gang, out of the picture.

Weiss, who had sworn to wipe out the Capone gang after Dion O'Bannion was murdered by McGurn, Anselmi, and Scalisi, was doing a fairly good job of carrying out his oath.

"We're going to have to set this guy up right," Al Capone said as they were being driven back to Chicago and Indiana after seeing Torrio safely off on a train. "He takes very little chances. You're going to have to do a real good job on him, Jack. I mean in setting him up."

"I'll set him up," McGurn promised. "He's going to get careless. When he does, we'll take him. And after him, Bugs Moran and those two gunsels, Frank and Pete Gussenberg. They're the ones who have been raiding our breweries and trucks, knocking off our drivers and taking the loads."

"Okay," Capone replied. "Go ahead. There's nothing to keep you back now. Do it your way."

Hymie Weiss, a volatile Pole, nursed the same ambition in reverse as did Capone and McGurn. With Torrio out of the way there was only Al Capone and McGurn.

Once he took those two he would have no difficulty in taking over the South Side and Cicero and thus control all of Chicago as well as avenge Dion O'Bannion's murder.

He received word on September 20, 1926, that Capone and McGurn, along with several others of the gang were at the Hawthorne Hotel in Cicero, Capone's headquarters in that city. He promptly got his gang together, formed a caravan of some fifteen cars, filled them with hoods carrying shotguns and machine guns and rode into Cicero toward the Hawthorne.

It was one of those crazy escapades which only he could conceive, an act completely beyond all reason. It told Capone that Hymie Weiss had blown his top, that to allow him to keep going any further would mean the end of all illegal activity in Chicago and Cicero. It now became, therefore, a matter of expedience as well as self-defense to kill him, get him out of the way before he brought the wrath of every legitimate citizen in the city down on the whole racket setup.

Hymie Weiss took his attack right into Cicero, to the heart of the Syndicate's biggest territory, the nerve center of the operations in the suburbs controlled by Capone.

It was shortly after noon. The day was like a day in June, filled with light and warmth of a persistent summer sun. In the area around Twenty-second Street, in the vicinity surrounding the Western Electric

plant, most of the employees of that plant were out to their lunch hour. They walked in pairs, chatting idly, the farthest thing from their minds being the incident that was to take place in the next minute.

It was absolutely beyond belief. They had grown accustomed to the wild, unpredictable doings of the hoods and gangsters in the city, but not this.

This was a little too much.

A cavalcade of cars, about fifteen in number, traveling in single file, about twenty feet apart, came into view from the west. The stream of cars looked like a funeral procession except that there was no hearse.

Hundreds of the strollers looked at the cars curiously.

Then, as the first car came abreast of the Hawthorne Hotel, all hell broke loose.

The noses of two machine guns were poked through the open windows of the car and the shocking sound of the rapid firing exploded on the calmness of the day. The crowd stampeded, yelling and screaming, many of them crouching in doorways, many others dashing into stores, shaking with fear. But this was only the beginning of the nightmare.

Inside the hotel restaurant Al Capone, Jack McGurn, Willie Heeney, and Charlie Fischetti were eating lunch. At the first sound of the shots they all dropped to the floor and lay flat, face down, arms

spread out to minimize a possible hit.

The first car in the caravan rolled on and the second car moved into position. Two hoods leaped out, knelt in front of the entrance to the hotel and sent a stream of machine gun fire rocketing into the lobby and the restaurant. Plaster crumbled from the walls of the lobby and restaurant; some of the furniture was demolished.

The attack continued until the occupants of each of the cars had emptied their weapons. The yelling and screaming of men and women continued. Some of them stood across the street and gazed with mouths agape at the incredible scene, unable to move, most of them petrified with fear.

It was a miracle that only one person was wounded and no one was killed. Louie "Blackie" Barko, a minor hood in the Capone mob, was shot in the shoulder as he stood in the lobby. Mrs. Clyde Freeman, sitting in an automobile with her husband and infant son suffered a minor wound when a slug creased her forehead. A machine gun bullet just barely touched her baby's scalp, and three slugs tore through her husband's jacket but inflicted no wounds.

Capone was anxious about the woman, her husband and baby. He felt that he had been the cause of her injuries and he paid all of the doctor bills and gave her \$5,000. The Freeman car had been struck

by some fifty slugs and Capone told Freeman to buy a new car. About forty other automobiles in the block also suffered damage of one degree or another.

The cops and reporters came minutes after the attack was over and questioned Capone, McGurn, Heeney, and Fischetti.

"It was a silly stage play," Capone said. "Whoever wanted to get me in this way must be nuts. They might just as well come after me with a brass band."

"Did you recognize any of the men who did the shooting?" a detective asked Al.

"No, not one of them," Capone lied. "We dropped to the floor at the sound of the first shot. We were face down. Didn't see any of the guys at all."

"How about you, Jack?" the detective asked.

McGurn shrugged his shoulders. "Same thing. I was on the floor face down."

After the cops and reporters left, Capone said, "That crazy Polack bastard. Why did he want to do it this way? This will really burn the town. The papers will scream for our scalps. Well, this is it, Jack. Go after him. All out. Night and day. Stay with him until he's dead."

"Burn him in half!" Fischetti cried, and brushed dust and dirt from his immaculate clothes.

The newspapers raised a loud editorial howl about the wild shootings on the city's streets. Citizen

groups appealed to the mayor and the district attorney to rid the city of its gangsters and killers. There were the usual investigations and promises that all would be done to effect arrests of those who had engaged in the affair.

About a hundred arrests of known hoodlums in the Weiss, Moran, Aiello, and Zuta gangs were made. They were held for seventy-two hours and then an army of lawyers descended with writs of habeas corpus and all were released. That was the end of the investigation. It was all the cops could do. Not so Al Capone. No legal writs, No hocus pocus. No nothing. Weiss was doomed.

On October 2, two weeks after the attack, a young man rented a room from Mrs. Annie Rotariu, who ran a rooming house at 740 North State Street, next door to the flower shop where O'Bannion was killed. Hymie Weiss had his headquarters in an office over the flower shop.

The young man told Mrs. Rotariu that he wanted a front room. No other would do. He was told there was no front room available but if he would take a hall bedroom for the time being he could have a front room just as soon as one was open.

On October 8, the occupant of one of the front rooms on the third floor moved out and Oscar Langdon—that was the name the young man gave—moved in. He advised Mrs. Rotariu that he worked nights and



AL CAPONE

slept days and asked her to see to it that he was never disturbed. He was a very polite and soft-spoken young man and Mrs. Rotariu said she would see to it that no one disturbed him in any way.

A couple of days after Oscar Langdon moved into the third floor front he had two visitors, one about thirty-two years old and the other in his late twenties. Oscar Langdon told Mrs. Rotariu that he had to go out of town for several days and that his two friends would take over his room while he was gone.

"If there is any extra charge," Langdon said, "I'll be glad to pay."

"No, no," Mrs. Rotariu replied quickly. "It's all right."

That same day, a blonde young woman rented a room on the third floor of an apartment house operated by John Fletcher. She gave her name as Mrs. Theodore Schultz and said that she was from a small town in South Dakota. The apartment house was situated at 1 Superior Street, on the south side of the street, about forty feet west of State Street.

The window of the third floor apartment looked out on the approaches to the flower shop and Hymie Weiss' office. The occupants of both rooms, the one on State Street and the one on Superior, now had views of the entrance to the flower shop, Hymie's office, the opposite side of State Street, and a part of Superior Street.

The beautiful young blonde from South Dakota gave up her room to two men after only a few hours stay. And now the four men, two in the State Street room and two in the Superior Street room, began their vigil. They sat there in the rooms, machine guns close by, smoked and waited—waited, patiently, coldly. They sat on their chairs and watched and waited.

Hymie Weiss had been tried, convicted, and condemned, and these were his executioners. There was no appeal possible, no stays of execution, nothing but the carrying out of the sentence of death, final and complete.

It was October 11, nine days after Oscar Langdon had rented his

room, and seven days after the beautiful young blonde had rented hers. The four men in the two rooms had remained there throughout, never leaving for a single moment. One watched while the other slept. Food was brought to the rooms by a young man who ran up the stairs, left the bags, and then ran down again, making certain that he was not seen on each occasion.

SHORTLY AFTER four o'clock Hymie Weiss; Pat Murray, his bodyguard; Sam Peller, his driver; W. W. O'Brien, an attorney, and Ben Jacobs, an investigator in O'Brien's employ, left the criminal Court Building where O'Brien had finished up the day's work as defense attorney in the trial of Joe Saltis and Lefty Koncil for the murder of Mitters Foley. The car with the five men in it drew up to the flower shop and stopped.

Death came with them.

In the two rooms men calmly picked up their machine guns, cocked them and leveled them at the car.

There were people in the streets, traffic moving, street cars, autos and a little girl with golden curl who stood in front of the Holy Name Cathedral and held a hoop in her hands. She looked up and saw the men in the windows, saw the weapons in their hands. She dropped the hoop and it rolled away from her in a crazy pattern and fell into the street. She stood there then, wide

eyed, her finger in her mouth, her gaze never leaving the sight of the four men above her.

W. W. O'Brien got out of the car first and walked slowly toward the door leading to Weiss' office. Sam Peller got out and paused to fit a key in the door of the car to lock it. Ben Jacobs was a few steps behind O'Brien. Then came Hymie Weiss, and trailing him was Pat Murray.

Then, as if by a prearranged signal, there was a simultaneous explosion as the four weapons began discharging their deadly missiles. Blinding flashes came one after another in sharp staccato series, the abrupt, emphatic noises of the machine guns tearing across the street noises and drowning them out. Pandemonium took over as men and women scattered from danger. The sidewalk in front of the flower shop became an instant sea of blood.

Hymie Weiss was hit by a dozen slugs and died where he stood, falling forward on his face. Pat Murray was hit by sixteen slugs and he fell only a few feet from Weiss. W. W. O'Brien was hit in the side, the arm, and the abdomen and he fell beside Murray. Sam Peller was shot in the groin. Ben Jacobs was struck several times in a leg.

Peller and Jacobs ran south, their lives in their hands, ran until they were out of range of the murderous gunfire and then dropped inside the entrance of a building about a block away. They knew as they cowered

in the doorway of the building, smarting with the pain of their wounds, that a force was alive in the city that was savage and fierce, that could burn, maim, and kill in a way they never thought possible.

Hymie Weiss had killed. Hymie Weiss had led a cavalcade of cars into Cicero and fired a thousand bullets at a hotel. Al Capone sent his men into the house where you lived, directed his guns at your heart and fired. That was the difference. Weiss had been second-rate at his trade. When he learned the difference it was too late because all he had was a fleeting instant of time in which to realize it and then the hard slugs scorched him, tore him, and shattered him completely.

Hymie Weiss and Pat Murray were carried into the flower shop where Dion O'Bannion had been murdered. There wasn't anything anyone could do for them. O'Brien was taken to a hospital and recovered after a long stay. Sam Peller and Ben Jacobs were not seriously hurt and were sent home after medical treatment.

Police found the two rooms where the killers had waited and from which they had directed their fire. About the floor near the windows they found dozens of machine gun slugs. There were other items, a gray fedora hat whose sweatband showed that it had been purchased in a store a short distance from the Hawthorne Hotel in Cicero, several

hundred cigarette butts, remains of meals, a dozen empty beer bottles. There were no fingerprints, nothing by which the killers could be identified, not even the hat. The store owner couldn't remember who had bought it or when.

Police came to the Lexington Hotel and questioned Capone. He was frank in his statement. You had to hand it to him. He was always willing to answer questions.

"That was nothing but butchery," Capone said. "Hymie was a good guy. We were friendly. I can't understand who wanted to take him. Maybe it was a jealous husband. You know Hymie was quite a ladies man."

"Four jealous husbands, Al?" a detective said. "Quit kidding. You know damned well this was a gang killing."

"So? What do you want me to do, confess? I was right here in this room when it happened. So was Nitti, Charlie Fischetti, Jack McGurn, and Willie Heeney. Ask them."

"That's right," McGurn said. "Ask me."

"I'd rather ask the devil," the detective replied.

"Naughty, naughty," McGurn answered and grinned.

"Okay, wise guy," the detective said, "you win again. But let me tell you something. We're looking for this guy Langdon and that blonde who rented the rooms. We're going to keep on looking until we

find them. We may get different answers then."

"That's your job, copper. You go ahead and find them. I'll tell you one thing. You won't find them here. I don't know who they are, and neither does anyone else in this room. Now get off my back."

The detectives left. Several hours later a reporter called and said he wanted to talk to Al Capone. He was in the lobby.

"Come on up," Capone invited. The reporter shook hands with Capone, Heeney, Fischetti, Nitti, and McGurn, then smiled. "I'm looking for a story on the killings, Al. I know you didn't do it," he said, "and I don't expect you to say you ordered it. I'd just like your view on this, that's all. Your name has come up frequently in the past year, ever since Torrio left town, and people are curious about you, about what makes you tick."

"I tick like anyone else," Capone said. "But let's look at it this way, at what you really want to know. Prohibition is a business. All I do is to supply a public demand. I do it in the best and least harmful way I can. I can't change the conditions. I just meet them without backing up. Most of my business is in Chicago. When prohibition came there were seven thousand five hundred saloons here. The people spent almost a hundred million dollars a year for booze at the old prices."

Nobody wanted this prohibition law. Chicago voted against it

Somebody had to throw some liquor on that thirst. Why not me? My customers include some of the finest people in the city. But I'm not just a bootlegger. I violate the 18th Amendment, or the prohibition law. Call it what you want. All right. So to they. What makes the supplier any different from the user? Take away the users and you'll drive every supplier out of business. Am I clear?"

"Clear enough," the reporter replied. "But as you said, why you? You're in a dishonest business. Breaking a law, whether it is a good law or a bad law is still dishonest. Will you agree to that?"

Al Capone grinned. "Sure, I'll agree to it. But if you want my opinion about honesty, I'll tell you this much: the only honest face I ever saw was on a dog!"

The reporter grinned. "Well, that's frank enough, I guess. One more thing, Al. There was a little girl standing in front of the Holy Name Cathedral. She's five years old. The corner stone in front of which she was standing was struck by a score of slugs, enough of them anyway to chip out completely eight words from the carved passage of the Vulgate version of St. Paul's Epistle to the Phillipians. Suppose he had been hit, Al? A little girl?"

"That would have been tragic," Al Capone replied sincerely. "I hope such a thing never happens. It would hurt me deeply if I were guilty of

having had a hand in anything like that."

Capone then went on to illustrate his position, saying, "I'm not a legitimate businessman, true, but I sell my goods to legitimate businessmen. I have to solve complex problems of manufacture, transportation of raw materials and finished products. I can't call on the police for protection, legal protection, that is, so I have to rely on illegal protection. Don't print that. I'm citing my problems. Do I buy cops?"

Al Capone shrugged. "Who knows? I have to protect my business and myself against rival gangs who would like to take me out of the picture. I have to protect myself even against men in my own organization. It's happened. You get the picture?"

"Of course."

"Okay. Now, I'll ask you what you would do in a situation like this? I'll tell you what you'd do. You'd stop any son—— who tried to hurt you, or was even thinking about it. I don't harm legitimate people. I'm willing to protect them, anxious to protect them. They're my bread and butter. The other people? The people who take my money for a promised service and then don't deliver, the boys who want to take over my business, in any way they can, and killing me would be the best way—well, I'm protecting myself. I think that's clear enough, isn't it?"

"Pretty clear. But—"

The gangster interrupted him. "One more thing. My name is Alphonse Capone. My friends call me Al. They don't call me Scarface, no more than you'd call a guy with a club foot a dirty name like Crip or Clubby. Got it? Good. Also I have a family. I have a wife and son. I have a mother. I'm a son, a father, and a husband. Just like you. Keep that in mind, eh?"

The reporter grinned and Al Capone grinned back.

Capone said, "Jack, see to it that this guy gets a case of our best liquor." He turned to the reporter again. "That's not a bribe. I just want you to see that we sell the best stuff that can be had. That's good business."

"Okay, Al. I've got my story. Thanks."

"I'm glad you called me Al." He held out his hand and the reporter shook it, nodded to the other men and walked out with McGurn.

Capone had a generous nature. An illustration of it, with a slightly humorous side to it, involved an old Italian who came to the Lexington Hotel seeking a loan in order to cure a very ill daughter. Capone's orders were never to turn back anyone who came to the hotel for his help. When he was told the man was in the lobby he came down and spoke to him.

"Mr. Capone," the man said in broken English. "I walk here, many miles, have no carfare. My daughter very sick. She must go to hospital.

Doctor say he need five hundred dollars to make operation."

Al Capone questioned the old man in English and Italian and satisfied himself that he was telling the truth. He then reached into a pocket and pulled out a roll of bills and peeled off a thousand dollar note, handed it to the man. "Here. This will take care of things."

The old man looked at the bill and shook his head. "I'm very sorry, Mr. Capone, but I don't have change."

Capone grinned, and the others in the lobby smiled at the old man's reply.

"That's okay," Capone said. "You keep it. You can buy food, yes?"

Tears came to the old man's eyes and he reached down for Capone's hand and kissed it several times. Capone drew back his hand in slight embarrassment. He nodded to one of the men in the lobby.

"Drive this man home, Tony."

This was one of the other sides of Capone. Another facet was his opening up of dozens of soup kitchens during the depression where thousands of hungry men, women and children were fed. Was this generosity motivated by selfishness? By ulterior hope of gain or to salve his conscience? It's a moot point but his many generous acts refute it.

Things got a little too hot in Chicago so Al Capone decided to take a trip, incognito, to New York. He got in touch with some of the mafioso there and they told him to

up on a train and come to town. He took along Jack McGurn and Charlie Fischetti. There was a suite of rooms for him, and equal suites for McGurn and Fischetti arranged for by local boys. All were registered under fictitious names.

Charlie Luciano and Bugsy Siegel took them on a round of the clubs, showing them a swinging cocktail lounge and restaurant on East 30th Street named Perilous Pauline, where they were introduced to the owner only as "Pauline."

Pauline was tall, svelte, with dusky hair and eyes, a former model. He recognized Capone immediately.

"You're quite well known, you know," she said. "Mr. Brown, isn't he?"

Al Capone smiled. "That's the name. I hear you are too. You were pictures, an actress?"

"No. Only a model."

"Well, when you decide to go to pictures you just let me know and I'll buy you a studio."

Capone insisted on going back to the restaurant several times.

"I like the food there," he said. "Yeah, I can see," Lucky Luciano said knowingly. "That's a real tasty dish you're fond of, Al."

Capone grinned. "She's the soup, lad, main course, and the dessert. I wasn't married I'd go for her."

"I won't tell," Luciano said. "Take a chance."

"No," Capone said seriously, "I'm one-woman guy." In that he was right. He had never been known



HYMIE WEISS

to chase women, although he could have had his pick of any one of a thousand show girls, models, or the Gold Coast gals who found him dangerously fascinating. That was another side of him that was little understood.

Back in Chicago, Al Capone learned that Bugs Moran had taken over the Weiss mob and picked up where Hymie had left off. If Capone had expected peace after the killing of Weiss he was sadly mistaken. When Moran took over the mob he made Schemer Drucci his chief lieutenant, the same role Schemer had with Weiss. Like Weiss, Drucci was determined to get everybody in the Capone Syndicate but especially Capone and Jack McGurn. Moran

and Drucci made raid after raid on Capone's trucks and warehouses. There were beatings and killings. Capone ordered McGurn to get Drucci and Moran.

"Those guys just don't get the message, do they?" Capone said. "Well, Jack, you give them our special telegram, and deliver it in person."

"It'll be a pleasure," McGurn said.

POLICE SAVED Jack McGurn the trouble of removing Drucci. The election between Mayor Dever and William Hale "Big Bill" Thompson was drawing to a close, and it looked like it was going to be a very close race. Schemer was fighting for political protection, for an in at city hall, and was backing Thompson all the way, as was the Syndicate.

Several of Schemer's boys had invaded the political headquarters of Alderman Dorsey Crowe, a supporter of Mayor Dever, and Chief of Police Morgan Collins, a Dever man, and a strong enemy of the gangs, had ordered a cleanup of all the hoods in the city who were afoot on election day.

On the day before election a squad car commanded by Lieutenant William Liebeck was cruising in the vicinity of Diversey Parkway and North Clark Street. Lieutenant Liebeck spied Drucci, Albert Singel and Harry Finkelstein, the owner of the Silver Slipper Cafe in the Briggs House. He arrested all three.

Finkelstein was released immediately but Singel and Drucci had to wait until several hours later, when Drucci's attorney obtained a writ of habeas corpus.

Drucci fumed and sizzled. Finally a telephone message was received by the detective bureau that Maurice Green, Schemer's attorney, was waiting at the Criminal Court Building with a writ. Schemer and Singel were put in a police car for the trip to the North Side. While the cops were escorting Singel and Drucci to the car Detective Dan Healy grabbed Schemer by a sleeve. Schemer, a notorious cop hater jerked his arm free, his face burning with rage.

"Keep your hands off me, you cop bastard!" Schemer snarled.

Healy, as much a hater of hoods as Drucci was of cops, shoved Schemer toward the car. Drucci tried to turn around to make another beef but Healy grabbed him by the coat collar and shoved him into the car. "Get in there and keep your big mouth shut, you two-bit punk."

When the car started off Schemer shouted, "I'll get you for this, you dirty cop bastard. I'll kill you if it's the last thing I do!"

"You will like hell!" Healy retorted.

Lieutenant Liebeck said, "Drucci, why don't you keep that toilet mouth of yours shut? You're asking for trouble. Keep it up and you'll get it."

The car was held up by traffic

Wacker Drive and Clark Street and Schemer started in again. "I are you to give me one of your guns and step out on the street, you cop bastard. You ain't got the guts. You're a yellow dog. All your traps are yellow!"

No one answered him.

Inflamed with rage, Schemer got reckless. He rose up in his seat and tried to grab Healy, then reached down and tried to take Healy's gun from him. Healy twisted in his seat, pulled out his gun and fired four times, the slugs ripping into Drucci's body. He dropped to the floor.

"Take me to a hospital," Drucci gasped. "I'm through. Take me to hospital."

The driver wheeled the car around, siren wide open, and sped toward a hospital, but Drucci died before they could get him medical aid. An investigation was held immediately into the killing, the district attorney wanting to know why an unarmed prisoner has to be shot and killed while being transported for release.

Schemer's family, however, didn't believe the district attorney's office could conduct an investigation that could be fair to the slain man. They engaged Attorney Charles Wharton to probe into the shooting.

At the inquest, Wharton said, "I want to find out how an unarmed prisoner in a police car guarded by four policemen can be shot and killed without the killing being cold-blooded murder."

Chief of Detectives William Shoemaker scoffed at the charges.

"Murder?" he said. "That's a big joke. Drucci was killed trying to take a gun away from a police officer. He got what was coming to him. It was his life or Healy's. We're having a medal made for Dan Healy!"

The coroner's jury exonerated Healy. He explained that he had believed his life was in danger and shot in self-defense. Schemer was given a nice funeral, was laid away in a silver-bronze casket from Sbarbaro's undertaking parlor. Drucci, like Hymie Weiss, was twenty eight years old when he died. It seemed like an age for O'Bannion's boys to die. Hymie Weiss left about a million dollars when he was slain. Schemer left about half that amount. They made big money. The trouble was that they didn't know how to live with it.

Capone, McGurn, Fischetti, Frank Nitti, and several others of the mob sent wreaths ribboned with the words *Rest in Peace*, and with the wreaths signed cards. Wreaths and cards were torn into shreds and tossed into the alley. Capone knew this would be done, as did the others, but it was their way of tormenting the rest of the gang.

Drucci's death left only Bugs Moran as a formidable foe to Capone's complete control of Chicago. Frankie Lake and Terry Druggan were on the West Side but their operations were small and Capone

said that since they were a couple of nice Micks he wouldn't bother them. Lake and Druggan refused to tie in with Moran, or with anyone else and Moran harassed them. They appealed to Capone.

"Keep going the way you are," Capone said. "Things will be straightened out. If you need any help in transporting your loads I'll lend you some of my boys."

He did. Moran, however, didn't recognize Capone's men, and didn't care, Capone's men or the devil's. He was going to take over the West Side. He was also out to get Capone and McGurn. He made reckless moves. Among his top men were Frank and Pete Gusenberg, two ex-cons with long criminal records. They were tough hoods, muscle-men, gunmen. What they didn't know was that where their viciousness left off Capone's began.

They caught up with McGurn one day in McCormick's Smoke Shop at Rush and Ontario Streets, where McGurn had stopped to make a phone call. They riddled the phone booth with machine gun slugs. McGurn was wounded, rushed to a hospital and recovered.

All the time McGurn was in the hospital he could talk about nothing else except Frank and Pete Gusenberg. He wanted them so bad he could taste it.

"Take it easy," Capone told him. "You'll get your chance. You just get well and when you get out of here we'll talk about it."

Jack McGurn recovered completely and when he got out he went a rampage of murder, knocking one Moran hood after another & unable to catch up with the Gus bergs. Frustrated, still fuming over the attack made on him, he devised the now infamous and bloody Valentine's Day Massacre.

Too much is known already about that vicious gangland mass killing to bear repeating. Needless to say the Massacre brought about Capone's end as the crime boss of Chicago even while it made him, for a time, king of the criminal empire, a king who held the city in the palms of his blood-soaked hands.

Unknown to Capone, a harmless looking man with balding head who wore rimless glasses to aid his near-sighted eyes was after his scalp. That man was Frank J. Wilson, Chief of the United States secret service.

The keys to Capone's Achilles heel were two bookkeepers who worked in *The Ship*, Capone's gambling joint in Cicero. They were Lou Shumway and Fred Ries, also J. C. Dunbar. Wilson's task was to find proof of income-tax evasion by Capone. In previous years, going back from 1928, Capone had either filed no return or had reported no significant income.

Art Madden, the secret service agent in charge of the Chicago office, told Wilson that hanging the income-tax rap on Capone would be as easy as hanging a foreclosure.

ign on the planet Venus. The grand fanjandrum of the checkered suits and diamond belts had Cook County by the throat. He did all his business anonymously, through front men. To discourage meddlers, his killers were turning out fifty corpses a year. Getting anyone to testify against Capone would be an almost hopeless task. Even if the men were put into protective custody and promised the moon, the threats against their families would keep them from testifying.

Frank Wilson knew all this. Nevertheless, he moved to Chicago prepared to make a case against Capone.

For a base of operations the government gave him and his three assistant an overgrown closet in the old post office building with a cracked glass at the door, no windows, a double flat-topped desk, and sceling walls.

Wilson spent months in fruitless investigation through banks, credit agencies and newspaper files. He prowled the streets of Cicero but could get no clue to show a dollar from the big gambling places, the parlors, the brothels, or the bootleg joints ever reached Capone.

Jake Lingle, a Chicago *Tribune* reporter, had been seen with Capone in Chicago and Miami and from the tips Wilson got, Lingle wasn't just writing interviews. Wilson saw the *Tribune* boss, Robert R. McCormick, and told him

Lingle's help would be appreciated by the U. S. Government.

"I'll get word to Lingle to go all the way with you," Colonel McCormick promised.

So great was Capone's sources of information that he learned of Wilson's meeting with McCormick and the gist of it. Jake Lingle was assassinated the next day in a sub-



way, right in the busiest part of the city, on Washington Avenue and Michigan Boulevard.

Wilson was stuck, bogged down.

Two frustrating years dragged by. Capone was all over the front pages every day. It was common talk that he got a cut on every case of whisky brought into Cook County; that he ran a thousand speakeasies, a thousand bookie joints, fifteen gambling houses, a string of brothels; that he controlled half a dozen breweries. He had bought a Florida palace on Palm Island and was spending \$1000 a week on banquets. He toured around in a powerful sixteen-cylinder limousine fitted with bullet-proof glass, slept in \$50 pajamas, and ordered twenty suits at a time.

at \$200 each. His personal armed forces numbered some seven hundred men equipped with automatic weapons and armored automobiles.

But evidence of lavish living wasn't enough. The courts had to see income.

One night, in a desperate mood, Wilson decided to check over all the data which he and his three assistants had piled up. By one o'clock in the morning he and his three assistants were bleary-eyed. While gathering up the papers he accidentally bumped his filing cabinet. It clicked shut. He searched his clothes and the desk drawers but couldn't find the key. He wondered where he would put the papers that were strewn all over the desk. Just outside the office, in a storeroom, he found an old filing cabinet full of dusty envelopes. He started to take out some of the envelopes.

In the back of the cabinet was a heavy package tied in brown paper. Out of curiosity he snipped the string and found three ledgers. One was a "special column cashbook." His eyes leaped over the column headings: "Bird Cage," "21," "Craps," "Faro," "Roulette," "Horse bets." Here was the diary of a big operation, with a take of from \$20,000 to \$30,000 a day. Net profits for eighteen months—the books were dated 1925-26—were upward of half a million.

"Who," Wilson wondered, "could have run a mill like that?" The an-

swer hit him like a baseball ball. Only three people—Hymie Weis, Bugs Moran, or Al Capone. Wei was dead. Moran was never known to own a gambling joint. The answer then was Al Capone!

The ledgers had been picked up in a raid after the murder of Assistant State's Attorney William McSwiggin in 1926. They came from one of the biggest gambling places in Cicero, *The Ship*, where diamond-studded crowds from Chicago laid down \$3,000,000 a year in wagers. Here was a record of it all, if Wilson could hang around Capone's neck. If he could do that he would have a case last.

Wilson had planted one of the best undercover men he had ever known in the gang, an agent named Eddie O'Hare. One afternoon, about a week later, O'Hare sent word to Wilson that he had to see him once. When they met, O'Hare was red-faced and excited.

"You've got to move out of your hotel, Frank. Right away. Al Capone has brought in four killers from New York to get you. They know where you keep your car and what time you come in and go out. You've got to get out this afternoon!"

Wilson didn't take O'Hare's information lightly. He knew all too well the lengths to which Capone would go to save himself from prison rap.

"Thanks for the tip, Eddie," Wi-

on said. "I'll move right away."

When O'Hare left him, Wilson told his wife, Judith, and said they were moving to the Palmer House. "Pack immediately, honey. You've always wanted to stay there. Remember?"

When Wilson reached the hotel he told the manager he was leaving for Kansas City. "Special assignment. Will you have a bellman up to my room right away and have the doorman get me a cab?"

Wilson and his wife were driven to the Union Station, went out a different way from that through which they had come, hailed a cab and were driven to the Palmer House. Judith wanted to know why all the cloak and dagger stuff.

"Just normal precautions," Wilson replied. "Nothing to be concerned about."

She wasn't too sure about that but said nothing.

Back at the Lexington Hotel Capone spoke to the four men who had come in from New York to take the hit on Wilson. "There's twenty five grand in this for you guys. I'm not going to tell you how to do this hit. Just get it done."

"It'll be done," one of the four answered. "Don't worry about it. We know our business."

"That's why you were brought in," Capone answered grimly.

Eddie O'Hare got in touch with Wilson at the Palmer House and told him the price on his head was \$25,000. "The guys that are to take

you aren't amateurs. They're real tough boys. I did a check on them through our New York office. Between the four of them they've probably murdered about thirty men. So watch your step. All the way."

"I will. You watch yours, too. If Capone learns about you, or even suspects you, you'll be a dead pigeon."

"I know. I'm being very careful. Okay. I'll be in touch."

Wilson called McCormick and told him about the price on his head. "I'd like you to run a story on it. It may give Capone the reason to think this over carefully before moving on me."

McCormick agreed to run the story. When it broke in the papers, Judith said, "We're packing up right now and going back to Baltimore. Nobody's going to shoot you if I can help it."

Wilson convinced her after a long argument that he was as safe in Chicago as he would be in Baltimore. "This story was planted by me. If Capone doesn't call off his dogs after this then he's not as smart as I think he is. I assure you he won't do a thing now."

Judith wasn't convinced but gave in. However, she insisted on being with Wilson as much as possible.

Wilson worked constantly on the ledgers taken from *The Ship*. He must have collected handwriting samples of every hood in Chicago, from voting registers, savings accounts, police courts, and every

other source that afforded a specimen. Hundreds of names were eliminated in the long drawn out process of comparisons and Wilson came up with one name, Lou Shumway, whose writing on a bank deposit slip was an exact twin to that in the ledgers. He learned from a tipster that Shumway was in Miami, probably working at Hialeah or the dog tracks.

McGurn suggested to Capone that maybe it would be a good idea to hit Shumway and Reis. "If this guy Wilson is checking you out on an income-tax beef then Shumway and Reis are the only two guys who can testify against you. I think we should take them."

Capone disagreed. "They won't talk. What have they got to gain? They've got a lot to lose, yes? They know what'll happen to them if they talk. The government's got no case against them. They just did a job. Bookkeepers." He shrugged. "Hell, they can't put you in jail for that."

"Maybe not. But they can make you think they can. And Reis and Shumway never struck me as stand-up guys."

Capone was firm in his position. "No. I won't agree to have them hit. Drop it, Jack. I'm gonna run down to Miami for a while, and to Palm Island. If anything important develops you can get in touch with me."

WILSON HAD NO way of getting a description of either Shumway or

Reis because neither had a police record and there was no way he could get a photo of them. His tipster told him that, "Shumway is a perfect little gentleman, refined slight, harmless. He's not a race track sport at all. You should be able to locate him from that."

"Maybe. If he's using an alias it will be a little harder."

In February of 1931, Wilson stood by the rail at Hialeah and looked at the man he had been stalking for three years. Capone sat in a box with two other men, obviously bodyguards, and two women. He was smoking a long cigar and greeted a parade of fawning sycophants who came to shake his hand. Wilson looked at Capone's pudgy olive face, his thick pursed lips, the rolls of fat descending from his chin, and the scar, like a heavy pencil line across his cheek, and thought that here was a man barely thirty-two years old who was the head of an army of cutthroats, hoodlums, gangsters, and killers, a man responsible for five hundred underworld murders, a man who held one of the largest cities in the United States at bay and had corrupted half of the city's law-enforcement officers, many judges, district attorneys, and politicians. Here was a man any country constable could arrest on sight and yet he, with the whole United States Government behind him, was as powerless as a sparrow to make an arrest. It infuriated and frustrated him.



JACK McGURN

Two nights later, however, he spotted Shumway, that perfect little gentleman, working at a dog track. He tailed him home and picked him up the next morning as he was having breakfast with his wife. Shumway turned several shades of green.

When Wilson got Shumway to the Federal Building he didn't mince his words. He told Shumway, "I am investigating the income tax liability of one Alphonse Capone."

Shumway turned pale but pulled himself together. "I'm sorry but you're mistaken. I don't know Al Capone."

Wilson put his hand on Shumway's shoulder.

"Lou," he said, "you have only two choices. If you refuse to play

ball with me, I will send a deputy marshal to look for you at the track, ask for you by name, and serve a summons on you. You get the point, Lou. As soon as the gang knows the Government has located you, they will bump you off so you can't testify."

Wilson waited for Shumway's reaction to that probability. Shumway was shaking a little.

Wilson then said, "If you don't like that idea, Lou, come clean. Tell the truth about those ledgers. You were bookkeeper at *The Ship*. You can identify every entry in these books and you can tell who your boss was. I'll guarantee to keep a secret until the day of the trial that you are playing ball with me. You will be guarded day and night, and I'll guarantee that Mrs. Shumway will not become a widow."

Shumway finally gave in. Wilson spirited him out of Miami and hid him in California under Federal protection.

Having Shumway, however, was still not enough. Wilson had to show, beyond doubt, that income actually reached the pocket of Al Capone. A painstaking checkup on all the recorded money transactions in Cicero finally showed that one J. C. Dunbar had brought gunny sacks full of cash to the Pinkert State Bank and bought \$300,000 in cashier's checks.

Agent Nels Tessem and Wilson caught up with Dunbar, whose real name was Fred Reis, in St. Louis.

They tailed a messenger boy with a special delivery letter and slapped a subpoena in Reis' palm. He was annoyed, especially since the letter was from Capone's Lexington Hotel headquarters telling him to take it on the lam to Mexico, where funds would be sent to him as he needed them.

Reis refused to talk at first. However, after a week in a special vermin-ridden cell in a jail Wilson picked out for him—Reis had a pathological fear of bugs—Reis cried uncle. He'd talk if Wilson would only get him away from the bedbugs. Wilson sneaked him before a Chicago grand jury in the middle of the night. His testimony put the profits of *The Ship* squarely in the pockets of Al Capone.

Wilson then packed off his scowling little treasure to South America with Government agents to guard him until he should need him in court.

In the autumn of 1931, two weeks before the Capone trial, Eddie O'Hare reported to Wilson that Capone's boys had a complete list of the prospective jurors. "They're fixing them, one by one—passing out \$1,000 bills, promising them political jobs, giving donations to churches. They're using muscle, too, Frank."

O'Hare handed over a list of ten names and addresses. "Here they are. They're right off the jury list. Names thirty to thirty-nine."

The next morning Wilson went

with U. S. Attorney George E. C. Johnson to the chambers of Federal Judge James H. Wilkerson, who was to sit in the Capone trial. There was reassurance in just looking at the judge. Somehow he seemed like match for Capone. Sure enough, the ten names O'Hare had given Wilson tallied with names thirty to thirty-nine of the judge's list. But the judge didn't seem ruffled.

Judge Wilkerson said, "Bring your case into court as planned, gentlemen. Leave the rest to me."

The day the trial started, Wilson fought his way through an army of reporters and photographers as well as several sob sisters. Capone came into court in a mustard colored suit and sat down at the counsel table just a few feet from Wilson. Phil D'Andrea, Capone's favorite body guard, sat beside him, sneered at the crowd. He adjusted Capone's chair, plucked a thread from his immaculate shoulder.

As Judge Wilkerson entered in his black robe Capone, behind the mask of his moonface, seemed to be snickering over the jury to new found friends and intimates who would soon send him back to the overlordship of Chicago.

Judge Wilkerson called his bailiff to the bench. He said in a crisp low tone, "Judge Edwards has another trial commencing today. Go to his courtroom and bring me his entire panel of jurors. Take my entire panel to Judge Edwards."

The switch was so smooth, so

simple, and overwhelmingly disastrous to Capone, who was certain he had the trial in the bag. The hoodlum's face clouded with the black despair of a gambler who had made his final raise—and lost.

Wilson kept his eyes on Phil D'Andrea. Capone said something to D'Andrea and he got up, nodded his head and started for the door. As he walked away, Wilson was sure he saw a bulge in D'Andrea's right hip pocket. It was incredible. There wasn't a hood in the world who would dare bring a gun into a federal court.

Wilson nodded to two of his agents, Nels Tessem and Jay Sullivan, and they followed D'Andrea into the corridor. There, Wilson backed D'Andrea against a wall.

"Give me that gun!" Wilson snapped. D'Andrea handed over the weapon. "And the bullets too!" D'Andrea ladled out a handful of ammunition from a vest pocket.

Judge Wilkerson interrupted proceedings of the trial to cite D'Andrea for contempt and promptly sentenced him to six months in jail.

D'Andrea protested that he was being railroaded and started a long speech about his Constitutional rights.

Judge Wilkerson interrupted him.

"You lost your rights when you brought that gun into my court. Take him away!" he ordered the bailiff.

Capone's lawyers now began to maneuver for a settlement and made

an offer of four million dollars in settlement of the claim against Capone if the judge would agree to a token jail term.

Judge Wilkerson refused the offer. "There can be no bargains in a federal court. I will hear the evidence in this case and rule accordingly."

United States District Attorney George E. Q. Johnson explained then that a leniency recommendation had been arrived at with the approval of the attorney general, the head of the intelligence unit of the Internal Revenue Department and an assistant secretary of state.

Judge Wilkerson said, "A plea of guilty is a full admission of guilt. The power of compromise is not vested in this court, but is conferred by Congress on other governmental offices. The court may require the production of evidence. If the defendant asks leniency by throwing himself on the mercy of the court he must be prepared to answer all proper questions put to him by the court. While the court may determine the degree of guilt, it must assume, on the defendant's plea, that the defendant committed the offenses as stated in the indictment."

Capone's attorneys requested a recess, which was granted, but not before Judge Wilkerson added, "If the defendant expects leniency from this court he must take the witness stand and testify on what grounds he expects leniency!"

Michael Ahern, Capone's chief counsel, then stepped to the bench, his voice ringing in protest. "The defendant and his counsel never considered that this would be an unqualified plea. Prior to the entry of the plea and prior to the return of the indictment, I conferred with the district attorney. The district attorney said if a plea of guilty was entered he would make a recommendation with respect to the duration of the punishment."

Judge Wilkerson held up his hand. "I understand that the district attorney intends to do that. However, as I have stated, there can be no bargaining in a federal court. I will take the recommendation under consideration. Other than that, I promise nothing."

Ahearn continued swiftly, "We thought that the recommendation would be approved by the court. We believed that the department would have the power to compromise both the criminal and civil liability, that it constituted an inducement for the defendant to enter the plea we made. I am frank to say that we would not have entered the plea unless we thought the court would accept it as made."

"The defendant must understand," Judge Wilkerson said, "that the punishment has not been decided before the close of the hearing. I wish to make clear again, most emphatically, that there can be no bargaining in the federal court."

Ahearn withdrew the guilty plea he had entered and submitted Capone to trial.

Reis and Shumway took the stand and testified. They admitted all the entries made in the ledgers, identified Capone as the sole owner of *The Ship*, testified to taking the money from *The Ship* to the bank and buying cashier's checks which they turned over to Capone. They were subjected to a withering cross-examination but stood their ground.

The trial lasted for weeks but each day saw Capone's chances to escape prison grow dimmer and dimmer. Finally, the case went to the jury. They deliberated for long hours and at last there came a knock from inside the jury room.

Reporters and photographers were poised with pencils and cameras. The bailiff notified the judge and lawyers. Judge Wilkerson emerged from his chambers and seated himself on the bench. The government's attorneys and the defense attorneys were in position. Judge Wilkerson nodded to the bailiff.

"Bring in the jury."

The bailiff walked to the jury room and opened the door. The jury filed in and took their places in the jury box.

Judge Wilkerson spoke to Capone. "Stand and face the jury."

Capone stood and stared at the faces of the twelve jurors, his face a mask of defiance and hate. He read their verdict in the grim expressions on their faces.

Judge Wilkerson faced the jury. "Have you reached a verdict?"

"We have," the foreman replied.

"How do you find?" Judge Wilkerson asked.

"We find the defendant guilty as charged on all counts."

The courtroom broke up immediately as reporters scurried to telephones.

Judge Wilkerson turned to Capone. "The court will pass sentence on October 24." He then thanked the jury for their just verdict and dismissed them.

On October 24, 1931, Judge Wilkerson sentenced Al Capone to eleven years in prison and fined than six months went by as Capone's attorney fought through an appeal. It was denied on May 3, 1932. Capone surrendered to the United States Marshal. He was put on a Dixie Flyer for the trip to the Atlanta Penitentiary.

A short time later, Capone was transferred to Alcatraz, the bleak and forbidding rock. He did hard time there. Many friends of the men he had ordered killed were incarcerated there and none of them had any love for him. No longer was he the big shot. No longer could he command a hundred guns to kill a man. He was just another convict with a number on his shirt. While he was there an inmate attacked him with a pair of shears in the barber shop.

Several years after his imprison-

ment, Capone began suffering severe headaches. His case was diagnosed as paresis, the deadly syphilitic disease which causes partial paralysis affecting muscular motion. He was ultimately released and went directly to his Palm Island, Florida estate. His mind was all but gone and he had difficulty recognizing friends he had known intimately. He lounged around in an old bathrobe, a beaten and broken old man at forty-eight.

He died in January, 1947, and his body was taken to Chicago, where he was buried in Mt. Carmel cemetery, the same cemetery that held in its graves hundreds of the men he had ordered slain.

The artful, brutal genius at organization could have been a success at almost anything he might have tried. Instead, he chose the dark caverns of the underworld. He amassed a tremendous fortune but it did him little good. The best years of his life, while he was still a young man, were spent in a prison cell.

What companionship he knew during the years of his confinement were the devils of his own making, enemies he never knew, men who hated him even though they had never crossed his path. When he died he was the loneliest of men.

The genius of crime had come to the dark pits of his own making. He was buried without fanfare, on a gray day when the cold winds of Lake Michigan blew in bleak parallel to the empty life he had lived.

THREE WIVES TOO MANY

*He knew how to live. Four dotting wives could testify to that little thing.
But—did he know how to die?*

by KENNETH FEARING



DEPARTMENT of LOST STORIES



A previously published story is not necessarily a permanently preserved story, available to anyone. Too often, in fact, it is just the opposite. So transitory is magazine publication alone—usually thirty days on sale—that far too many outstanding tales are overlooked and forgotten before they have their deserved chance at fame and recognition. Here, in this new department, you will read some of the most unusual stories ever written. "Three Wives Too Many," by Kenneth Fearing, is no exception. Mr. Fearing, world famous for his unusual and powerful fiction, deserves a special kudo for his tale, for it appeared in the very first issue of MIKE SHAYNE MYSTERY MAGAZINE. When you are fortunate enough to see a story called "Department of Lost Stories," remember that it is a work which in the judgement of a discriminating editorial board is too outstanding to be forgotten. The present short story is no exception. Read it. You'll not forget it for a while!

THE EDITORS

RICHARD C. BROWN gazed in contented speculation across the breakfast table at the plain but pleasant face of his wife, Marion. He was aware not only of her companionable silence, but savored also the cozy perfection of the tiny alcove, in fact, the homely restfulness of the entire bungalow.

For a moment, he almost regretted the need to leave this suburban idyll on the outskirts of Camden, and Marion, in order to

reach his home in Newark by nightfall, and to be with Bernice, his fourth and most recent wife, at the usual hour. But he knew that domestic peace, to say nothing of his own safety, depended upon the most rigid adherence to his fixed routine.

Bernice, a natural and vivacious blonde, was much younger and very much prettier than Marion, whose tightly combed hair showed an unmistakable tinge of gray in its oth-

erwise inky darkness. Marion, in fact, was the wife Richard had who was as old as himself. When he married her, he had rather felt he was making a reckless gamble.

But now, after four years—no, come to think of it, five years—he felt she had turned out extraordinarily well. Whereas Bernice, he had to face it, still couldn't cook, after almost a year of marriage. Her cooking, like her disorderly housekeeping would probably never improve.

Still, she was lively, and decorative, though by no means as gorgeous as the ripe, still magnificently cream-skinned and redhaired Lucille. Lucille was his first wife, and although nowadays she was showing more and more ill temper, especially when she drank, he was still very fond of her, and they still maintained their original home in Hartford.

He would be seeing her, on schedule, three days hence. After that, came the turn of the dark, brooding, capricious Helen, his second, in a suburb of Boston. Helen was a little extravagant. She always had been. But what were a few faults? They were only to be expected. After all, he probably had a few, himself.

So Richard C. Brown speculated, as he often did, weighing the pros and cons of this life he led.

Had he chosen wisely in selecting matrimony as his profession? Richard frowned faintly, and softened the harsh phraseology of the question. He hadn't *chosen* it, exactly.

He had drifted into it, beginning as an ardent, even a romantic, amateur. It was so easy to get married that he had not even thought of that vulgar word bigamy, until some time after he had already committed it.

But after two ceremonies, with a third impending—his match with Marion—yes, by then he had realized he was launched upon a special type of career, one that might have certain risks attached, but one that also, with care and prudence, offered rich rewards.

"Richard? Is that what's worrying you?"

Richard returned his attention to Marion, suddenly aware that her voice echoed a whole series of remarks he had not quite caught. Richard smiled, genuinely surprised.

"Worrying me, dear?"

"For a minute you were frowning. I thought perhaps your mind was on that offer to buy the house and lot. It was such a *big* price the broker offered, I could hardly believe it. I thought maybe you regretted turning it down. I wonder if you did it just on my account, even though you thought it was really a mistake to pass up the chance. Was *that* it, Richard?"

Richard was still more surprised—honestly surprised, and deeply touched.

"No, nothing's worrying me," he said, in affectionate rebuke. "Least of all, that proposition to sell. I'd forgotten all about it."

Marion, pouring him a second cup of coffee, pursued the subject to its logical end. "Because, if the offer is still open and you think we ought to sell, I'll sign. Our joint title to the deed, I mean. Perhaps you thought I sounded unwilling before. But that was only because I didn't really understand what a wonderful price we were being offered."

Richard was mildly amused, but still more moved. The offered price had been quite good, certainly, but by no means high enough to justify the nuisance of finding or building another place, then moving and getting established.

"No," he said firmly, "I'm quite happy here, and we won't think of selling, unless you've changed your own mind, and that's what you want yourself."

With large and patient generosity, he emphasized the point. "Since I have to be away so much, on business, I've always felt any decision about the house should be mainly up to you. That's why I insisted, from the first, that title to the property should be in both our names."

He did not add, though he privately noted the fact and gave himself a good mark for it, that this was one of his fixed rules for lasting success in marriage on a mass basis. Never play the domestic tyrant, he often told himself. Let the little woman—whichever one it was, though Lucille and Helen were hardly little—make the most of the



household decisions, or at least imagine she made them. It kept her happy and, whenever he had to make an important move, made her all the more amiable in deferring to him.

Sometimes, at moments like this, Richard wished he had some friendly, professional colleague with whom he could talk over the finer problems of, say, quadruple and concurrent matrimony. But this could never be. Richard did not doubt that superior operators, like himself, were in existence. But they were not readily to be found—any more than he himself was.

There were only two types of repeaters the public ever heard about, and Richard disdained them both. On the one hand, he was no idiot Romeo who married seven or eight pretty but penniless young things, usually in the same region

if not the same city, and inevitably came to grief on some absurd but mathematically predictable mischance. Love was the key-word to describe this type, love and carelessness.

Then there was the other well-publicized practitioner, the sinister Bluebeard who, having married for money alone, then proceeded to do away with . . . No, this gruesome technique so revolted Richard he shrank from even thinking about it.

Marriage should be undertaken only for money *and* love. Richard imagined himself giving this sage advice to some earnest young man who might appeal to him for guidance, before choosing this specialized vocation as his own lifework. Marry for money *and* love, and never relax one's careful attention in fostering each, that was what Richard would tell the acolyte.

Quite carried away by the thought, Richard crumpled his napkin and slapped it down beside his breakfast plate in brisk, executive encouragement. Of course, there were hundreds of other facets to such a career, minor perhaps, but highly important. There was the choice of employment one should pretend to have, for instance, the changes of identification that would never overlap, and . . . Richard sighed, abandoning these thoughts as idle.

After all, there was no young man seeking his counsel. In the nature of things, as long as he re-

mained successful, there never would be.

"Richard? Don't you want to look at it? Just to be sure before they install it and lay the cement?"

He realized that Marion had again been talking for some time, unnoticed. It irritated and vaguely frightened him as he was not observing his own precept to pay careful attention.

"Of course, dear." He groped, but expertly. "Why? Aren't you satisfied?"

"Oh. I suppose the furnace people ought to know the best place for it. They must install hundreds of auxiliary fuel tanks. But if you'd just look, to make sure. Maybe you'll think it ought to go somewhere else."

He remembered now. It was a domestic trifle, an improvement in the heating system. He nodded, glanced at his wristwatch and stood up.

"I'll do it right now. Then I'm afraid I've got to be going."

"Do you have a lot of calls to make today, Richard?"

"Lots," he said cheerfully, and proceeded to overwhelm wife number three with a torrent of details. "Elite, Paragon, Acme, three or four Eat-Rites, two Welcome Inns. That's just between here and Trenton. I hope I'll reach there by evening. But with the list of restaurants I've got to see—about twenty-five to thirty a day—I'm not sure just where I'll be tonight. Or, for that

matter, in the next ten or twelve days. Eleven days, to be exact," he added thoughtfully. "Now, let's see the tank."

On the way to the basement, Richard collected his hat, overcoat and suitcase. He set the suitcase down in the kitchen, then followed Marion through the door that led downward. At least, he went two-thirds of the way down the wooden steps, intending, from that barest possible display of interest, to give full approval to her arrangements.

Standing on the lower part of the stairway, he could see most of Marion's basement. This basement belonged to Marion, because all of its appointments were hers, whereas the Hartford basement had a bar, which made it both his and Lucille's. Besides the assorted laundry machines, and the door of the small partition that formed Marion's photographic dark-room — her one hobby — he saw that a silt-trench affair had been drilled through the cement floor and dug out of the dank earth beneath. Beside it stood the new tank, not yet lowered into place, and a bulky, unopened sack of some ready-mixed cement.

Richard had now seen enough to give either his approval or criticism, if any, with suggestions. He still inclined toward approval, as easier and quicker.

"It looks all right to me," he said.

Marion peered up at him, anx-

ious and pathetically helpless. "Are you sure?" she asked.

Richard's reply was a little short. As a matter of fact, there was a hazy something he did not like at all, seeing Marion like that, innocent and greying, a little too trusting, standing beside that gaping hole.

"Quite sure. It's just where I would have—" He broke off acutely disturbed by the phrase he seemed to be using, and without knowing why. He changed it to, "It couldn't be better if I'd chosen the place, myself."

He turned quickly and went back up the stairs, with Marion following. Somebody, Richard felt darkly, was being in rather poor taste. But who? That mound of loose dirt, and the bag of cement besides. There was something about the scene that was not only vulgar, but oppressive.

He had placed his suitcase down beside the kitchen's outside door when Marion reappeared. She smiled brightly, but his spirits did not lift. Unaccountably, he had another obscure association of ideas.

For some reason—for no logical reason—his mind turned to a certain crude, lurid, seamier side that less successful members of his calling undeniably used, to the shadowy half-world of Lonely Hearts clubs, matrimonial bureaus, and throbbing exchanges. Let there be a particularly messy explosion in the realm of matrimony, and the odds were even that one of those Lonely Heart

clubmen, or clubwomen, was in back of it.

Richard held such strong views against agencies of this type that he couldn't abide mention of them, not even in jocular vein. It was one of few subjects upon which he had, at one time or another, quarreled with several of his wives. With all of them, in fact. About divorce, too, he was quite strict. It could easily undermine his career.

"Have you got your sample case, Richard?" Marion asked.

"It's in the trunk of the car," he told her. "I've got everything. You don't need to come out."

"Well . . . ?"

"This is the fifth," he reminded her. "I'll be back for dinner on the evening of the sixteenth. Meanwhile I'll phone you from time to time and if anything comes up, you can reach me through the New York answering service."

"All right, Richard. Have a good trip."

Thank you dear. Take care of yourself and, above all, don't worry that beautiful head of yours about trifles. Just relax. Let *me* do all the worrying."

They kissed warmly. Then he picked up his suitcase and went down the driveway to the garage. It was a fact, he reflected, that all the worrying *was* left to him. Marion probably did not appreciate just how much worry there was.

Neither did Bernice, nor Lucille, nor Helen—none of them. But, un-

der the circumstances, he couldn't ask, he couldn't even hint, at the credit he really deserved for the many detailed responsibilities he bore.

However, these added cares were not too heavy—they were hazard of his career. Backing his car down the driveway, Richard's moodiness was already gone.

In front of the house, he looked up and waved to Marion, now standing in the open doorway, her striking figure undimmed by a simple house-dress. She waved affectionately in return.

His was a full, engrossing life, he decided as he drove along. Some people might even think it fascinating, if not too much so, imagining it filled with dreadful risks. There was a small element of danger, of course. But this only added zest. It offered the faint tang-laden pinc of adventure, without which, really his regulated life would be unbearably placid. It was long since far too-well rehearsed.

II

THREE HOURS later, shortly before noon, Richard C. Brown passed temporarily out of existence.

The loss of identity required less than a minute. It took place in busy railroad checkroom in Philadelphia. It required only the time to check his salesman's sample case and order-book—Speedie Sandwich Co., Automatic Cutters

Precision Knives. Then, all that was needed was to take out a similar sample-case and order-book for his next incarnation, as a salesman of cosmetic novelties.

He had entered the checkroom in the name of Richard C. Brown. Under that name, he had actually made three lackadaisical stops at three widely separated restaurants that morning. At one of them, he had actually been forced to make a sale, as his order book showed.

When he came out of the checkroom, he was Robert D. Brown. In that identity, he would make two or three torpid calls at drugstores during the afternoon, plus a few more during the next three days. That was part of the schedule—the most tiresome part, of course. It was a waste of time. But it was time indispensably given up, he felt, to protect his best interests in so many roles.

The business concerns for which he sold—or, at any rate, with whose products he traveled—were small and specialized. No high-pressure salesmen competed for their exclusive territorial rights.

The owners of these companies might wonder what type of paralysis afflicted the slow-motion Brown, but, from their standpoint, paying him only on a commission basis, even a few sales were better than none.

As for Mr. Brown, he had other fish to fry. Far more important mat-



ters demanded his time and intelligence.

As always, when he made the change from one identity to another, he paused before the first mirror that caught his eye. The hesitation was brief, hardly more than a flicker—it was as though he half-expected to find revealed, literally, a new and totally different man. It was as if he expected to see features even more forceful and magnetic, if that were possible, than they had been before.

This time, the mirror was a rectangle in a vending machine. Robert was a little disappointed that the reflection showed no marked change. His face, in spite of its forcefulness, was smooth, oval, a

little asymmetrical, just as Richard's had been. The magnetic eyes that peered back at him from beneath wisps of sandy eyebrows were still pale-blue and grey, much like those of an alert rooster. Even the hair—he removed his hat to make sure—was a downy pink, and still scarce.

Robert D. looked like Richard C. He also looked like Raymond A. Brown of Hartford, and Reynold B. Brown of Boston. In any identity, for that matter, he knew that he resembled a great many men people find it hard to remember.

Then what made him so irresistible to women?

Robert shrugged, puzzled but complacent, and moved away. Probably, he decided, when he stared hard at himself in a mirror, his inner personality simply went into aloof, sensitive retirement.

It was convenient, of course, that his appearance was not too remarkable. It was much, much safer, to be inconspicuous. He looked like any respectable, married, thirty-nine-year-old businessman, hard-working and moderately successful—and why shouldn't he? The description was true.

There was only one detail in this picture of himself that did not quite satisfy him. His success, in a highly speculative investment field, was far too moderate. At least, it had been thus far, in the fifteen years since his first marriage, when Lucille's financial assets gave him the means

to begin dealing on a large scale in his favorite securities.

The securities he bought were betting slips, in the horse-racing market. Brown—all four of him—did not exactly play the horses. It had long ceased to be play. He studied, he computed, he, doped according to the rules of his system, and then made some very shrewd investments.

It was full-time employment, too. No system is so perfect it can't be improved, he often told himself, after which, he set about computing and doping some more, seeking to plug up all possible leaks, leaks that stubbornly reappeared in his formulae.

On his way to lunch, the real start of his business day, he bought every form-sheet and newspaper with information about the fluctuations that would take place that afternoon, as soon as the tracks opened. In the quiet restaurant where he dined, he was a familiar figure, with his charts, his notes, his record books.

The waitress who set his place asked him, "Feeling lucky today, Mr. Brown? I could certainly use a long shot myself, if you've got something sure."

Questions like this made him wince, inwardly, as hopelessly amateurish. How could anyone speak of luck, a long shot and a sure thing all in the same breath? But he smiled amiably and tried not to sound condescending.

"Maybe. If I find something really hot, I'll let you know."

But the waitress scarcely heard him, her mind skipping ahead on a more facetious tangent. "What I wonder about customers doping the horses. Well, maybe you can. But I'd like to see you try something tough, like making book on people. Be honest, Mr. Brown; sometimes you can't figure your own wife."

Brown began a firm reply. "On the contrary," he said, and then just as firmly stopped.

Without even asking, or caring, which wife the waitress had in mind, the subject was taboo. It was a sore point besides. He had been about to state that just the opposite was true. His wives ran true to form he had found, and he only wished—how deeply and painfully he wished!—he could say the same for horses.

But the subject was too distressing to talk about. It would be unwise to speak with too much authority. By this time, the waitress had given him a menu and gone.

It was a fact, though—and a sad one—that, as Raymond A. Brown, he had suffered reverses in his first two years of marriage with Lucille, and they had cost him nearly all of the \$27,000 with which she had opened their joint bank account. Joint bank accounts, like joint ownership, of property, Brown regarded surely among man's finest invention. There had been a dark period when, if Lucille had thoughtlessly

written a check, it was quite possible that their marriage might actually have exploded.

Fortunately, he had grown very fond of a new and recently widowed acquaintance, a lady well worthy of becoming his wife. This was Helen, and she had brought a comfortable \$40,000 to her joint bank account with Reynold B. Brown. The name, like the initial was chosen as an orderly help to Brown's memory—at that time, he had had no intention of working his way through the alphabet.

So, with Helen's unconscious but timely backing, he had recapitalized and refinanced all around. Naturally of course, he had devoted his own added insight toward a few final, vitally necessary improvements in the system.

These improvements had helped—but not enough.

His losses had been considerably slowed down. Investments that showed splendid results almost equalled those that failed. There was one year, indeed, when his accounts showed that he had broken practically even.

All the same, his resources were again depleted when he met Marion, and she, too, was welcomed into the firm—though not in those exact words. Her \$18,000 contribution to a joint bank account with Richard C. Brown had been modest, but timely and, for a while, it seemed as though the tide had finally turned.

But it hadn't turned enough—not quite. He met the gay, chaotic Bernice, and there came a day—the day he learned she had recently inherited \$20,000—when he asked her, too, if she would like to be his helpmate.

This was how he became Robert D. Brown, sitting among the financial guides and investment paraphernalia spread out on the table of a quiet Philadelphia restaurant.

This was why he regretted that his success, thus far, had been so moderate. The tide had now, at last, definitely turned. But there were still precarious days, uncertain weeks, ahead.

This was why, while he concentrated on his chops and salad and coffee, he also pondered the mysteries of the alphabet. Would there ever be a Rudolf E. Brown? If so, what would the fellow's wife be like? He couldn't help wondering.

He finished lunch and, afterward, went on with his calculations, making the serious decisions of the day. When he had them, as he paid the bill and tipped the waitress, he remembered something.

"Bold Magician in the sixth at Bowie," he told her. "That's today's best."

"What?"

It was apparent she had forgotten their earlier talk. Brown merely repeated the name of the horse, smiling with professional reserve.

He had a lot to do that afternoon. Place his bets—collect on

yesterday's single winner—call on three or four drugstores with those tiresome cosmetics. This last he considered a waste of time, save for use as an alibi he hoped he would never need.

III

IT WAS SEVEN o'clock that evening when Brown arrived at the big, solid apartment building in Newark where he and Bernice had established residence. He did not like it, though he felt no fear, at sight of a police prowl-car, an ambulance and other official cars, drawn up before the entrance, with a knot of spectators gathered in solemn curiosity on the walk outside.

But he could not down a wave of uneasiness when he exchanged a nod with the elevator man, then received a sudden, startled glance of recognition, quickly veiled and averted. The attendants usually spoke after one of Brown's trips—and his suitcase showed he was just returning from one. Now they ascended in silence to the fourth floor.

He saw why, when he stepped out. The door of his apartment was open. Beyond it, he saw men obviously in authority, men in uniforms, men in plain clothes, even one man in white. Something unscheduled had occurred, and that alone spelled danger. But this was more than unusual—it was grim. Fright followed his first consternation, then panic, then dread.

Rigidly controlling himself, he walked through the small foyer of the apartment and halted in the middle of the living room. A uniformed police lieutenant looked at his suitcase, then at him. The lieutenant's stare was sympathetic, but, at the same time, it openly and carefully studied his face.

"Mr. Brown?" he asked.

"Yes. What's the matter?"

"Bad news, I'm afraid. It's your wife." The lieutenant paused, letting his register. Brown gave no reaction, except to put down his suitcase, then urgently and fearfully wait to hear more. "I'm Lieutenant Storber. Your wife is dead."

Brown gave a stunned, disbelieving echo. "Bernice dead? She *can't* be. What happened?"

The lieutenant made indirect reply with another question. "Did your wife have any reason to commit suicide, Mr. Brown?"

"Suicide?" Brown's astonishment was a spontaneous, total denial of the idea. "That's impossible. It's silly. Why, she just bought another . . . No, it's out of the question."

"She just bought another *what*, Mr. Brown?" the lieutenant asked him gently.

Brown answered mechanically, but his features began to come apart. "Another cook book. Would a person who did that ever think about . . . ? It was a thick one too."

"We know. We found it in the kitchen."

Brown's knees seemed to become

unfastened, and the lieutenant helped him as he sagged into the nearest chair.

"I tell you, there must be a mistake," he insisted weakly. "You haven't investigated thoroughly enough. You'll have to look around some more. When did it happen? How?"

The lieutenant sighed, took out a notebook. An interne emerged from an adjoining room, one used as a lounge and library. Not seeing Brown, he spoke to two men in plain clothes who were giving the living room a cursory inspection.

"D.O.A." said the interne. "It looks to me like a stiff dose of cyanide in a cocktail, probably a side-car. That's up to the medical examiner's office. But I'd say she drank it quick, and death was practically instantaneous. At a guess, it must have been six or seven hours ago. Around noon."

The interne went out, and the lieutenant sighed, flipped open the notebook, found a pencil.

"That's about it, Mr. Brown." The perfunctory words were filled with commiseration. "We just got here, ourselves, following a telephone call from some woman, probably a friend or neighbor we haven't yet located, and that's what we found. Your wife in the next room, with one empty glass—hers! Out in the kitchen, where she must have mixed it, cyanide in the bottle of brandy. No sign of a visitor. Nothing disturbed, apparently. She left

no note, which is a little unusual. But you'd be surprised how often they don't."

"I don't believe it," Brown protested hotly. "She didn't kill herself. She couldn't. *Never!*"

The lieutenant sighed again, and his voice was soothing. "I know how you feel. But that's the way it hits everybody, when it's close to them. Because, if you realize a person is depressed and despondent, then something is done about it, more likely than not, and it never gets as far as this. There are other times a person gets into a suicidal frame of mind and doesn't tell anybody. When that happens, naturally nobody believes it, at first."

"I'll *never* believe it," said Brown firmly. "You've got to look into this. This is something else. It's *got* to be".

"Oh, don't worry, we'll dig into it," the lieutenant assured him heartily, but without much personal conviction. "We won't drop this until we're completely satisfied. Now, where have you been this afternoon, Mr. Brown?"

Brown's surprise was genuine. "Who—*me*?"

"Yes, you. We'll begin with you. Where were you around twelve or one o'clock, for instance?"

"Having lunch in a restaurant in Philadelphia," said Brown readily. He supplied the name of the place. "I was there for almost two hours. The waitress ought to remember me—she asked for a tip on the races,

and I gave her Bold Magician. After that, I made several business calls at drugstores. My order book is in the car downstairs. It shows where I stopped."

The lieutenant was nodding, making only the briefest of notes. In spite of his shock and grief, Brown realized that the schedule to which he had adhered so rigidly was indeed paying off, in a serious emergency. He had never anticipated an emergency quite so drastic and dreadful.

But now that it was upon him the plan was there, a safeguard against the exposure of his illegal marriages, against even the possibility of suspicion in this present trouble.

Local newspapers, the next day carried three- and four-paragraph stories on inside pages about the apparently impulsive, macabre suicide of Mrs. Robert D. Brown. There were pictures of the twenty-eight-year-old Bernice. One caption read: *Beauty Drinks Death Cocktail*. Stories mentioned Mr. Brown who had not been at home, as salesman traveling for Glamor-Glo Cosmetics.

Bernice had two older sisters, one of them married. These, with the brother-in-law helped Brown with the few arrangements that had to be made. The brother-in-law confided in Brown and Lieutenant Storber.

"To tell you the truth, I'm not surprised. Bernice was always

moody and different. Most people wouldn't notice, but there were little things gave her away, to anyone who had his eyes open."

She was buried on the third day, at a quiet service. Brown came back to the apartment afterward, but there was nothing for him to do. He made arrangements to have the furniture stored and to terminate his lease. Then he packed his personal suitcase. It was the third day. He was due in Hartford that evening, at seven o'clock. Lucille would be expecting him—as Raymond A. Brown, salesman for a firm that manufactured smoker's accessories.

Brown felt better after the change-over. Lucille might have her faults, but, tactfully handled and ignoring her sudden outbursts of temper, she could also be a wonderful tonic for the nerves. Bruised and shaken as his were, after the last three days, he needed an influence that would restore his normal poise and self-confidence.

Therefore it was strange, and more than frightening, when he arrived at his modest, two-story Hartford home that evening, to find a police prowler car parked in front of it, along with others whose official look he knew too well. The newly familiar scene was only too familiar.

He felt that this was a motion picture he had seen before. He hadn't liked it the first time, but now he was plunged, in a single moment, from uneasy disbelief to numb horror. This couldn't be hap-



pening—not again—not to him.

But it *was* happening. It didn't help, for some reason it was only worse, much worse, that this time he knew all the lines by heart, including his own.

"Mr. Brown?"

"Yes. What's the matter?"

"I'm afraid I have bad news for you, Mr. Brown. It's your wife. I'm Lieutenant-detective Todd. Your wife is dead."

"Lucille? Dead? She can't be. It's impossible. It's silly. This whole thing is silly. What happened?"

"Did your wife have any reason for taking her own life, Mr. Brown?"

"Lucille kill herself? *No*—absolutely not. That's out of the question." Brown's repudiation, this time, came from more than spontaneous grief. There was black suspicion behind it. "There's no chance

she committed suicide, Lieutenant. None!"

The lieutenant's sympathy was partly habit, but he showed a trace of real curiosity, as well. "Why do you say that, Mr. Brown? How can you be so sure?"

Brown opened his mouth to tell him why. It could not be coincidence that two of his wives, unknown to each other, had died by their own hands within a matter of days. But he checked himself in time. The mere existence of his surplus marriages, if exposed spelled ruin.

"It wouldn't be like her," he said lamely. Then he collected his shattered wits and marshalled the solid facts of his alibi.

They were good enough for Lieutenant-detective Todd. The widower had been having lunch in a quiet restaurant, fifty miles away, at the hour Lucille drank a cocktail, an old-fashioned this time, loaded with cyanide. She had been alone in the house, in the downstairs bar. The bottle of liquor used in the drink also held cyanide.

An old, dusty tin of the substance had been found among the handwrought bracelets, brooches and costume novelties in which Lucille dabbled, as a hobby. Again, there was no note. But Lieutenant Todd told Brown that this happened more often than most people thought.

Three days later, the same ironclad story satisfied Detective-inspector Cosey of the Boston police, who

was inquiring into the bizarre suicide of Mrs. Reynold B. Brown, housewife, of that city. Though hard-boiled, Casey and his fellow-officers were deeply touched by the protests of the bereaved husband that Helen couldn't, wouldn't and didn't knowingly drink that deadly old-fashioned. Again; Their investigation would be thorough, but did Brown have any cold facts to support his refusal to accept suicide as the obvious conclusion? Anything at all except his intuition?

Brown did, indeed, have one overwhelming fact, but he was not in any position to offer it. Some unknown party or parties had a profound grudge against him and his wives, and was methodically carrying it to the extreme limit. But who? Of more immediate importance who would be next?

The answer to the last question was simplicity itself. When they buried Helen, and Brown tried to pull his tangled thoughts together, he was at least able to perform a problem in elementary arithmetic—subtractions, unfortunately. By ruthless annulment—he hated to call it murder, in an affair so personal—he had only one wife left, Marion, in Camden.

As to the method used in breaking up his happy homes, Brown had little doubt. Some inconspicuous person, a casual friend, even a complete stranger with some plausible tale, had in each case called upon the victim when she was alone.

At some point, the hostess would suggest cocktails, and, when she had poured them, her attention must have been diverted long enough, or, perhaps, she had been decoyed from the room, while the fatal drink was prepared.

After that, it was easy. Thoroughly wash, then replace the second cocktail glass. Put some more cyanide in the already open bottle, then unobtrusively depart. To the police, each case was no mystery, because it stood alone. Only Brown knew there were three, that they were linked and what the link was. Only Brown and—a murderer.

But who had such a fanatical resentment against Brown, the happy home-builder, and his uncomplaining wives? It occurred to him that he might somehow have come to the notice of an avenging misogynist, some crank who hated not only women but marriage, especially wholesale marriage. That, he thought, might well be it. Brown, personally, had few close friends. He had, as far as he knew, no enemies.

After Boston, his regular, schedule called for a restful, relaxing two-day trip back to Camden and now, in spite of serious misgivings, he set out for the city on the Delaware. He was worried about Marion, among a lot of other problems. He had forgotten to phone her, immersed as he was in so many tragic details. He wondered if he should call her now, with a preemtory

warning not to drink any cocktails with anybody, no matter who?

He decided against it. For one thing, Marion never drank cocktails. He had never known her to drink anything alcoholic, not even beer, and she ought to be invulnerable to the only technique the killer seemed to know.

For another thing, if he did phone, any strange injunctions of that sort would be awfully, awfully hard to explain.

IV

AT SEVEN o'clock on the evening of the sixteenth, the day and the hour he was expected, Brown rolled to a stop at the curb before his house in Camden. It was with relief that he found room to do so. The street was curiously empty of police and other too-familiar official vehicles, Marion met and greeted him at the front door, just as he reached it.

"Richard, darling!" she said, with warmth.

Even as they kissed, he spoke without thinking, from habit. "Yes. What's the matter?"

"Nothing—why should there be? Did you have a nice trip?"

Brown recollected himself, almost with a start. He shook his head, and, at the same time, nodded, achieving a circular motion that might mean a lot, but was intended to signify nothing.

He went on into the living room

and, for a moment, stood in the middle of it, looking around. It, too, seemed rather empty, unpopulated as it was by hard-eyed but sympathetic detectives.

Could it be that the nightmare was over? he wondered. Though the riddle might never be solved—and Brown realized all too well that an official solution would be most inconvenient—the devastation, at least, might have ended.

Brown's eyes were caught by an array of pamphlets, magazines, circulars, brochures, he had never seen before, certainly not on the table of his own living room. But their titles told him with ghastly clarity what they were—*Harmonious Hearts. Why Wait for a Mate? Cupid's Catalogue, The Widow's Guide.* Literature from a host of Lonely Hearts Clubs, that blight of amateurism upon a lofty profession. What were they doing here? Who put them there, in the first place.

He took a deep breath to bellow an enraged question, but changed his mind. He looked at Marion, who smiled brightly in return, as composed as ever. Tonight, however, she seemed even more composed.

Suddenly, Richard did not want to hear the answer to his unspoken question. At least, he did not want to hear the right answer, and he was almost certain this was the answer she would give.

Let the little woman have her secret foibles, Brown decided. Silence was truly golden.

"Are you tired, Richard?" she asked. "Shall I mix us some cocktails?"

Us? Brown sagged into the nearest chair, missing the firm encouraging support of Lieutenant Something-or-other, in Newark. But he managed a nod, even ventured a cautious query.

"Thanks, honey. Only I thought you don't drink?"

Marion's reply was forthright and cheery. "Oh, I do now. It came over me, maybe I've been missing something. So I forced myself to experiment with a cocktail here and there, just now and then, these last few days. And I found I enjoyed them. A little drink never hurt anyone, at least, not me. What would you like, an old-fashioned? A side-car?"

Brown was not aware that he had any preference, but Marion had already moved to perform the mixing. While the sound of ice-cubes, glasses and a serving tray clattered pleasantly from the kitchen, he thought hard about some of the phrases she had used. They were poorly chosen, no doubt about it.

Unless, of course, they were well-chosen, and intended to be. Had she meant, actually meant, a certain nerve-wracking interpretation that could be placed upon her words? An old-fashioned—or a side-car. These suggestions all too closely resembled bull's-eyes.

He looked at the table, again read a couple of obscene titles. *The*

Widow's Guide. What widow? *Why Wait for a Mate?* This had a horribly impatient ring.

Brown remembered something suddenly and stood up. Marion emerged from the kitchen, bearing the tray with glasses and shaker as he entered it, like a sleep-walker, and crossed to the basement door. He went down the wooden steps, and looked.

Sure enough, the hole for the fuel tank was still there, unfilled. So was the bag of cement. But the new tank was gone. There was the door to Marion's small but well-stocked darkroom. Didn't photographers often use certain potent chemicals?

From upstairs, through the floor of the living room, he heard the muffled, steady rattle of ice in a shaker. After a full minute of thought, he turned around and went back up.

The drinks were poured and waiting, and the scene, to the eye alone, was a study in domestic peace. Marion sat in the center of the lounge, before a low stand holding their drinks. Opposite her was the large chair he favored, when at home in Camden.

"I made old-fashioned," said Marion, superfluously. "Try yours, Richard. Tell me if it's just right."

Just right for what? Still standing, Richard glanced once at the glass placed next to his chair, then at his packed suitcase, resting where he had left it beside the door.

"Tell me all about your trip,"

Marion coaxed. "Don't look so upset. After all, nothing terrible happened, did it? To *you* I mean?"

The question sounded both leading, and commanding. He answered it. "No."

"Then *do* sit down and stop worrying. You look positively haunted, like some fugitive from justice. As if the police might link you with a lot of old crimes, any minute, and then they'd be looking for you everywhere, year after year, no matter where you went, or how you were disguised. Relax, Richard. Sit down."

He sat down, but he didn't relax. The horrible picture she had painted was—or could be—far too logical.

"It's that job of yours," Marion declared, maternally. "Travelling, I mean. The Speedie Sandwich Company asks too much, expecting you to cover such a wide territory. I think you ought to tell them that, hereafter, you'll confine yourself to just this area—our area. Don't *you* think you should—Richard?"

Richard guessed, from the tone of her voice, that a nod was expected. He delivered it. But what he was actually thinking about was the tap of a cop's hand on his shoulder, in Florida maybe, or even Alaska, arresting Raymond-Reynold-Robert Brown for the murder of three wives.

"And I'll keep all your books and accounts for you," Marion informed him, with relentless kindness. "Those petty details can be a bur-

den. Hereafter, you can let *me* do all the worrying about them."

For a moment, Brown wondered whom she was quoting, but then he envisioned the vast scope of her cooperation and the disaster it spelled. He would not only have to sell those confounded gadgets, but close scrutiny of his accounts would disclose, and foredoom any further operation of the whole Brown speculative system.

Now she was off on some other subject altogether. It was strange, Marion never used to be much of a talker.

"... so that's what I told the men from the company. They should take back the fuel tank until you finally decided, and, in the meantime, leave things the way they are. Have you tasted your drink, Richard? Come on, try it." She lifted her own glass, and exclaimed, with spirit, "Bottoms up."

Did he really have the dismal

choice, between hopeless flight and his own basement?

"No thanks," he said, desperately, making the choice.

"Oh, don't be silly! Here, try a sip of mine." She leaned forward, as though to proffer a taste, and the next moment he found she had pressed her glass into his hand. "You keep it. I'll take yours."

It was a most understanding gesture, a most reassuring gesture—temporarily. Marion drank with zest. Richard took a sip. Nothing happened to either of them.

Minutes later, Marion was demanding his attention again.

"... so, if you decide differently, Richard, any time you want, you can change your mind," said Marion.

"Decide?"

"About that hole downstairs."

"Oh, yes."

"Whatever you want. It's up to you."

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RAFT OF FEAR

Manacled together, prey of a murderous sun, a killer and his captor waited for the inevitable climax. The first one to fall asleep—he would be the one to die!

by CLAYTON MATTHEWS

THE TRIPOLI SHORES blew at two-thirty-three in the morning, half-way between Honolulu and San Francisco.

She was already listing badly when Devlin rolled off the top bunk and hit the deck. There was another explosion, muffled this time. The cabin light flickered and went out, then came on again, dimmer. The list increased.

From the lower bunk Bart Crocker yelled, "For God's sakes, Devlin, get me out of this! This tub could go any minute!"

He rattled the handcuffs, one link around the bunk post, the other around his right wrist.

Mentally damning Crocker's mor-

tal fear of flying, any and all coding of criminals and most specifically damning all rusting freighters, Devlin fumbled the key chain from around his neck and uncuffed Crocker from the bunk. Then he quickly transferred the cuff to his own left wrist, linking them together, killer and cop.

He looped the chain around his neck again, dug the Police Special out from under the pillow, jammed it solidly into the waistband of his pajamas.

The *Tripoli Shores* lurched and Devlin snapped, "Let's go, Crocker!" "But how about my clothes?"

"No time. Move!"

Devlin headed for the cabin door,

A Splendid Suspense Thriller



pulling his prisoner along bodily. The corridor was bedlam. People, mostly in night clothes, ran about aimlessly, screaming, yelling.

The ship carried some thirty passengers, and it seemed to Devlin they were all in the corridor. There were a couple of crewmen in sight, but they seemed disinterested in establishing order. Devlin swung Crocker around in front of him and used the man's burly body as a battering ram as he bulled his way toward the companionway at the end of the corridor.

He emerged on deck with Crocker in tow and skidded to a stop while he assessed the situation. The bow of the ship was riding low, as though plowing a furrow in the choppy sea.

Sirens wailed, whistles blew. Flames flickered up forward and black smoke billowed like gushing oil. The slope of the deck was so steep Devlin had to hook his arm in an open porthole to prevent them from plunging down the slant like two greased pigs.

Devlin was a tall man of thirty-five, lean as whippcord, with a dour countenance, snapping black eyes and Indian-dark hair. He usually shaved twice a day; now, at close to three in the morning, the power part of his face was shadowed with a blue-black beard. He looked like a thug, while his prisoner was handsome as a matinee idol, with a con man's ready smile. The fact that he had a record longer than Devlin's arm and faced a charge of murder

in San Francisco didn't show on the surface.

Devlin realized that the ship could nose down into the sea any second. He saw two lifeboats nearby, swinging with the sick motion of the ship, but Devlin knew that two inexperienced men hadn't the prayer of launching them. Two crewmen, one blackened by smoke, went skidding past. Devlin yelled at them, but they hurried on. A passenger emerged from the companionway and lost his footing. He slid down the deck and disappeared over the side with a fading scream.

"We've got to do something, Devlin! This thing's going!" Crocker yelled.

"Any bright ideas? I'm open to suggestions," Devlin said, gaze still poking restlessly about. Not that he really expected any help from Crocker. Devlin had early learned that man made his way through the world on his own resources. Depend even a little bit on someone else and you wound up losing the ball game.

The ship lurched again, the bow dipping lower. The din increased, the smoke billowed higher, people and things slid past. Out of the corner of his eye, Devlin saw a cylindrical object sliding toward him. He stuck out a foot and guided it in against the cabin wall, pinning it there.

"What the hell is *that*?" Crocker demanded.

"I think it's an inflatable life raft."

Devlin's mind raced, trying to dredge up what he knew about inflatable life rafts. It was damned little.

"Pick it up!" he snapped.

Crocker managed to stand the raft on end.

"I'm going to let go the porthole and shove us toward the rail. Whatever you do, don't let go the raft. Understand?"

Crocker nodded mutely.

Devlin took a deep breath.

"Now!"

He losted his hold on the porthole, wrapped his free arm around the raft and shoved with all the strength in his legs. They skipped along the deck at an angle, riding the raft like some cumbersome sled, and for a sickening moment Devlin thought they were going to miss the rail. Then they smashed onto it.

"On your feet, Crocker!"

They climbed laboriously to their feet and clung to the rail. Devlin searched with fumbling fingers along the perimeter of the packaged raft. Then he found what he was looking for. He hooked his fingers in the loop in the line. He indicated to Crocker what he wanted. It was difficult, but they finally managed to balance the raft on the ship's rail. Devlin nodded, and they shoved it over, Devlin jerking the line at the last possible instant.

He watched, holding his breath, as

the raft tumbled end over end toward the water. Then it opened, blooming like a huge yellow flower, just before it struck the sea.

They climbed awkwardly onto the rail, hung there for a moment before plummeting down together. Devlin saw the water coming up and tensed himself. Then something struck his head a stunning blow, and blackness closed around him like a shroud.

His first awareness as consciousness seeped back was of motion and a throbbing head. Without opening his eyes he probed with an elbow and encountered the sponginess of rubber. He was on the raft then.

They were on the raft, he amended, for the handcuffs were still on his wrist, and there was pressure on the other end.

He remembered the gun. It was gone! He knew that without feeling for it.

The pajamas were wet through. With that thought he began to shiver. He opened his eyes and saw Crocker sitting at an angle from him, knees drawn up. And on the drawn-up knees rested the Police Special. It was some time past dawn, the light spilling over them like dirty dishwater.

Crocker grinned, winking one blue eye. "Welcome back to the living, Devlin."

Did he have the key, too? Devlin groped for the key chain. It was gone. But if Crocker had the key,

why were they still handcuffed together?

"Lose something, Devlin?"

"Damn you, Crocker," Devlin said hoarsely.

"Watch your language." Crocker jerked his head. "We've got company."

Devlin raised his head with an effort.

A woman huddled at the far end of the raft. She could have been thirty, she could have been forty. It was hard to tell. Amazingly she was fully dressed, except for shoes. She wore a two-piece suit of some dark tweedy material. The suit was wet and hung on her like a sack. Her narrow face was without makeup of any kind, and her brown hair was up in curlers. At least there were a few left, and she was struggling to extricate those.

Devlin looked around. The raft floated alone on an empty body of water, not another vessel in sight. The day was gray, cloudy, making it difficult to ascertain where the sky ended and the sea began.

Devlin glanced again at the woman and found her gray eyes regarding him with revulsion. Devlin knew he looked like hell, and he tried to think of something reassuring to say to her.

Then Crocker chuckled. "It's all right, Miss. Don't be scared. He can't do a thing to you so long as I have the cuffs on him and my gun."

Devlin snapped his head around

and saw Crocker wearing his most beguiling smile. "What the hell does that mean?"

"Mean? Why, nothing much Devlin. It's just that I told her how I'm an officer escorting my prisoner back to stand trial for murder. She doesn't much fancy being on a life raft with a killer. Can't say I blame her much."

Devlin pulled himself up to a sitting position and put the snap of command in his voice. "Miss, what's your name?"

She reacted instinctively, immediately. "Jean. Jean Winters."

"All right, Jean Winters. Crocker has it backwards. I'm the cop and he's the killer!"

"Now isn't he the one!" Crocker said with an admiring grin. "You believe him, Miss Winters?"

Of course she didn't. One look at her face told Devlin that. She wouldn't believe him, even if he by some miracle had that proverbial stack of Bibles under his hand.

"You see, Miss, Devlin here has an absolute terror of flying. So we didn't want to violate his civil rights. Can you imagine that?" Crocker chuckled again. He was enjoying himself immensely. "The lengths we go to nowadays to protect the rights of criminals!"

The reversal of roles was slightly ridiculous, and Devlin fought the urge to idiot laughter. But what difference did it make in their present situation who was the cop and who was the prisoner? With the key

lost they were locked together and not even death could sunder them. If Crocker killed him now, Devlin would be around his wrist like a dead and stinking albatross.

Then Devlin revised his thinking. It *could* make a difference. If they came within sight of land or were rescued, Crocker would then shoot him, claiming an escape attempt and be freed of a dead body and on his merry way before their identities could be straightened out.

The back of Devlin's head throbbed with pain. He touched it gingerly with a finger and felt the warm stickiness of blood. "What happened to me?"

"You whacked your head on the boat coming down. I had a hell of a time with you, Devlin. For awhile there I thought you'd pull us both under."

"And the ship?" Devlin felt another, less severe pulse of pain on the side of his neck. He touched a finger there and found a raw gash.

"The ship went down like a rock." Crocker made a steep, diving motion with the hand holding the gun.

"Anyone else make it?"

"I don't know. Too dark to see. Come daylight, we were the only cats in view."

Devlin knew now what had made the gash on his neck. The key chain. Crocker must have tried to wrench it off and had lost it in the water. It was the only possible explanation.

He glanced over at the woman.

"And you, Miss Winters? How did you manage?"

"I couldn't sleep. I was getting dressed for a walk on deck when I heard the explosion." She was speaking directly to Crocker, as though Devlin didn't even exist. "I couldn't see anyone launching life-boats. I realized the ship was sinking, so I jumped overboard. I swam around in the water for a little. Then I saw the raft and got on it."

"How'd you happen to be on board?" This from Crocker.

"A vacation cruise. I'm on my way home. I'm a schoolteacher."

"My dumb luck," Crocker muttered in Devlin's ear. "Marooned on a raft with a broad and she's an old maid schoolteacher!"

The sun suddenly came through the scud of clouds, blazing with noon fury, and Devlin felt sweat pop out on his forehead. "We've more to worry about than your sex life. Any water on board?"

"One jug." Crocker nudged a round canteen with a toe.

"Food?"

"I didn't find any."

Devlin's gaze swept the raft. "I see only one oar. Where's the other one?"

"How the hell should I know?" Crocker roared. "What's with all the questions? *I'm* in charge here!"

Devlin eyed Crocker in speculation. He was playing the tough cop and handling the role well. Just how tough was he? Eventually they would both have to sleep. It would be a

deadly game, seeing who could stay awake the longer. It was the only chance he had, Devlin knew, to out-wait Crocker and grab the gun when he fell asleep.

"It doesn't matter about the missing oar," Jean Winters said. "It's better we stay right here. Surely they sent out an SOS and there will be ships answering the call. If we have wandered away, they might never find us."

There was a pedantic flavor to her speech, as though she were lecturing a group of particularly dull students. Now, under their gaze, she flushed and drew the suit jacket about her shoulders. She mumbled, "I read that in a book once."

She was right, of course. But how far away were the ships answering the call and how long would they be in arriving?

Providing the ship *had* sent out a distress call . . .

The sun blazed relentlessly, wheeling across the sky that soon became brassy. Their clothes dried, shrinking like constricting bonds. There was nothing they could rig for a shade. Thirst plagued them. Crocker, in his role of command, decreed they could have a swallow each of water every hour. They watched constantly for a vessel.

Nothing, not even a smudge of smoke on the horizon.

They drifted, the raft bobbing lazily in the calm sea. Devlin felt sure they were moving steadily away from the location of the ship's sink-

ing, but there was nothing to be done about it. The raft's motion was lulling. Devlin's head throbbed, he felt flushed, feverish, and he fought sleep like an antagonist.

By mid-afternoon the sun was a torture instrument. Jean Winters removed her suit jacket. She had a white slip underneath, but she turned away primly as she shucked the jacket and hung it over her head and shoulders.

Devlin's head kept dropping sleep stealing over him like a drug pleasantly dulling his senses. Each time his head jerked up he found Crocker watching him malevolently

Why did he fight it? Why didn't he just sleep? If he slept now, got what rest he could, he would be better able to battle Crocker when the time came. In Crocker's situation he couldn't afford to sleep.

Devlin gave up the battle and slept.

It was dark when he awoke. He lay for a moment without moving. His head seemed better, only a dull throb like a remembered toothache. He was lying on his back, the handcuffed arm propped up at an awkward angle.

Very slowly he turned his head. Crocker sat as though he hadn't moved, knees still drawn up. There was enough light to show that his eyes were open, gleaming like a cat's.

Devlin started to sit up. Out of the corner of his eye he caught a blur of movement. He jerked his

head aside just in time as the gun barrel crashed down. His shoulder went numb.

The gun rose, fell again. Devlin threw his arm up to protect his face. The gunsight gouged his flesh like a dull knifeblade.

It was weird, a scene of violence done in pantomime, the only sound the whistling of Crocker's expelled breath each time the gun fell.

The third time he connected with Devlin's head, and pain exploded like a white light behind his eyes. Again the gun descended. The agony was too much; he was going under.

Faintly he heard the schoolteacherish voice: "Stop it! You'll kill him!"

And Crocker: "Stay out of this, lady! He's *my* prisoner! He was trying for the gun . . ."

Devlin let go and spiraled down into darkness.

His next coherent thought concerned his head. It hurt like the devil. At least he was still alive. Then he wondered about Crocker's motive. Had he meant to kill him? Or had he figured a pistol-whipping as one way of getting some sleep?

Fury poured through his veins. His first impulse was to hurl himself at Crocker, but he knew that would be a mistake. A sudden wrong move would likely bring about another whack on the head and that could easily finish him.

So he lay without moving, his bruised mind working craftily, alter-

nately dozing and watching Crocker, until dawn broke. There were no clouds this morning, the sun loosening its furnace heat immediately.

Devlin croaked, "I need a drink of water."

"Do you now?" Crocker said savagely. He picked up the canteen and turned it upside down with the cap off. "All gone, Devlin. Suffer, damn you!" He threw the canteen into the sea.

A small cry came from Jean Winters. "You shouldn't have done that! What if it rains? We could trap some water!"

"In what, your hanky?" Crocker's voice was ugly. "Get off my back, schoolteacher!"

Then he sank into a sullen, glaring silence, his gaze never leaving Devlin. With satisfaction Devlin noticed that the man's eyes were red-rimmed from lack of sleep, and his light skin had turned a bright red from the sun.

Devlin settled down to play out the waiting game. The sun baked them, their tissues drying, and nothing showed on the brassy roll of sea.

Crocker's alertness deteriorated. His head dipped, eyelids drooping heavily, only to jerk up again to glare at Devlin. The pauses in his attention lengthened slowly but surely.

Devlin's chance came late in the afternoon. Crocker's chin came to rest on his chest, the hand holding the gun falling to his side. Devlin made his move.

But he miscalculated his weakness. Reaching across Crocker for the gun, he faltered and fell against the propped-up knees. Crocker snorted awake. The gun arm started up, and Devlin fastened his hand around the thick wrist, pinning it to the bottom of the raft.

He didn't have the strength to hold it there. Slowly it moved up, the wrist bending to bring the gun to bear, Crocker grunting with the effort. Crocker's breath had the odor of garbage, and his eyes were a wasteland. He would kill this time; he was past all rationality now.

Devlin twisted his knee up, then eased the pressure on the wrist. At the last second, just before Crocker could squeeze the trigger, Devlin slammed the man's arm across his leg. The gun cracked across his knee, the pain excruciating, but Crocker held on. Devlin slammed the arm down again, and the gun flew out of Crocker's hand, landing somewhere out of sight. Devlin turned his head to look for it, and Crocker's fingers locked around his throat. His strength was amazing.

In seconds Devlin's lungs were bursting. Desperately he brought his own arm up, chopping at the underside of Crocker's arm. It had no effect. Again he chopped, and yet again. The arm held rock-steady, the finger squeezing, squeezing. From somewhere deep inside himself, Devlin dredged up a final burst of strength.

This time it worked. He knocked

the arm loose. Gulping for precious air, sobbing, he smashed his fist into Crocker's face, once, twice, three times. Then he stopped, realizing dimly that all resistance had gone out of the man. Crocker was slumped over, unconscious.

Devlin crouched on all fours, chest heaving, head hanging. It was several minutes before he could breathe normally again. Finally he remembered the gun and turned slowly. Jean Winters was on her knees behind him. She held the gun in her right hand; it was aimed directly at him.

Despair washed over Devlin. It had all been for nothing.

Then, incredibly, she said, "Mr. Devlin?" and held the gun out to him.

Devlin took it numbly. "When did you know?"

"You mean, how did I know you were the officer and not he?"

"Well—Yes, I guess that's what I mean."

"When he beat you last night with that gun. He was like an animal!"

Devlin's grin hurt. "But Jean, you're a schoolteacher. Surely you know about police brutality?"

She sniffed. "Yes, I know about police brutality. I've even witnessed instances of it. But what I saw last night was different. Why, he was trying to kill you!"

"Yeah. And he came close . . ."

His voice trailed off, and he goggled at her. She was staring past

him, eyes saucer-round. Her mouth opened and closed, but no words came forth. Then, still on her knees, she began waving frantically.

"Now her words became intelligible. "A ship—There's a ship!"

Sure she was hallucinating, Devlin slowly turned his head.

And there was a ship. It was plowing along at a slant and so far distant from them that only the stacks, spewing smoke, and the upper decks were visible to them.

"They're too far away. They'll never see us," he said bleakly. "If there was only something . . ."

Jean Winters scrambled across the raft and scooped up the lone oar. She climbed to her feet and began waving it.

"Not good enough," said Devlin. "If we had something to tie onto it . . ."

Without a word she dropped the oar, stepped out of her skirt, then bent, crossing her arms, and pulled

the slip over her head. She was left wearing only a bra and panties. She looped the slip straps around the oar and stood erect, waving it back and forth.

Without the camouflaging clothes, her figure wasn't half bad.

Devlin wrenched his gaze away and looked at the ship. After an endless time, it turned in a long graceful curve and headed straight for the raft. A whistle blew reassuringly.

Devlin glanced back at Jean Winters just as she lowered the oar. Under his gaze she blushed, actually blushed, and reached down for her skirt. Then, with a defiant jerk of her head, she stood erect without picking up the skirt.

"Well?" she said challengingly.

He saw that he would have to revise his estimate of her age. She couldn't be over thirty.

He grinned and said, "Well?"

Next Month:

THE ZODIAC MURDER

The Strange Night the Stars Spelled Death

by MERLE AHERN

Here is one of the most unusual crime stories ever written, the story of the strange night when the stars spelled Murder. The girl—she was timid, cool—and not quite good enough to be true. And now she was horribly dead, and I must find her killer—or join her on a slab at the morgue! Don't miss this exciting new story. It will feature next month's superlative new issue!

Why Don't You Answer,

by GAREN DRUSSAI

*They looked alike . . . thought alike . . .
lived alike, Bernice told herself grimly.
But there's one thing she had decided.
They were not going to die alike!*

AT FIRST Bernice couldn't believe it. She and Theodore were so close—so almost like one! Yet, only a few moments ago Bernice realized that she hated him. She put her hand to her forehead, shading her eyes from him, apprehensive that he might guess, from looking into those blue depths that were the exact color of his own, the sharp bite of her hate.

"Dear, it's just a little headache," she said, stretching out on the couch. "I'm sure it will go away soon. I'll lie down and rest here for a while."

Theodore held out the glass to her, insisting: "I just knew you had a headache. Here, take this fizz stuff and you'll be over it in no time. Remember, we want to see that movie at the Grand tonight."

Bernice sat up. It was the simplest thing to do. She drank it all quickly and lay down again, closing her eyes. She heard his soft, careful tread as he left the room, closing the door behind him.

Bernice's eyes popped open wide. They were like two bits of shiny blue glass, set in the pinkness of her round, tea-pot face. And now, they stared almost unblinkingly as she thought of the years she and Theodore had been married—nearly ten, since they had looked at each other and known that they were soul mates.

The resemblance between them was in more than their look-alike eyes. It was also in their round, pink faces and in their short, chubby bodies. But most of all, it was in their think-alike minds.

Theodore?



Both of them had the same ideas about everything and thought of the same things to do at the same time. If anything, the devoted Theodore would even anticipate Bernice's every wish. She had only to feel thirsty to have him at her side with a glass of water.

When she became bored or tired at a party, he immediately jumped up with an excuse for leaving.

Friends would tease the adoring couple about their open affection, and Bernice would simply look at Theodore, smile, and say that 'their marriage had been made in heaven'.

Why then, thought Bernice as she lay there, did she now, after all these loving years, suddenly hate Theodore? How was it possible to hate someone so like herself?

She rubbed her forehead, wishing

the headache would go away. Just latey, it seemed, she had begun to feel annoyed whenever Theodore uttered the exact same thing she had been thinking about. Of course, she couldn't help it if she happened to say something and it just happened to be what Theodore was about to say, too.

If only she could occasionally have some privacy in her mind, and be able to think her own thoughts without wondering—

She felt shackled, burdened with the hateful weight of him.

Bernice sat up. She had to be free of Theodore, and quickly! Before he looked into her eyes and knew.

But how? She mentally ran through the contents of the medicine cabinet. Then she considered the garden supplies. Nothing. Not a thing that she could be sure of that was safe. Tomorrow, she would have to—

Theodore came into the room on tiptoe. "Ah, darling, you're up. Feeling better?" He was carrying two martinis and he set them down carefully on the long, low coffee table. "Do you want an olive, precious? If you do, I'll get it for you."

Inadvertantly, their eyes met and Bernice, snatching all thought from her mind, looked at him with her blank, blue stare.

"Yes, dear, I believe I will have an olive."

He turned and went out, humming under his breath. Bernice

looked at the martinis. One was definitely set right in front of her; the other one was at the far end of the table. She reached over and switched them, trying to keep from trembling. Just to be sure, she told herself.

He came back, whistling. "Please stop, Theodore. My head still aches."

Clucking in sympathy, he dropped an olive into her glass. "Here, have your drink. It will do you good."

"On second thought I'll skip the drink." Bernice grimaced. "It just doesn't appeal to me now."

Theodore sat down across from her in the deep easy chair. He regarded her with solicitude, sipping at his drink. "Think you will feel like seeing a show later? If not, we can skip it for tonight."

Bernice watched him as he drank. Her heart was beating faster, wondering, *had he meant to kill her?*

As though puzzled by her gaze, Theodore leaned forward. "Dear, are you ill or something?" He downed the last of his drink and then all at once the glass fell from his hand and he clutched his stomach.

Bernice gasped. It was true, then! He had tried to kill her! She felt cold with fear.

Theodore sank back, his face contorted as with pain.

"Bernice! Bernice!" He cried out to her. "Help me!"

"You meant that for me. You

meant to kill me! Tell me, Theodore, when did you start to hate me." The emotion she felt was choking her. She could scarcely talk.

"Which one of us started the hate, Theodore? Did I see it in your eyes, first? Is that what made me want to—?"

"Why don't you answer, Theodore?"

Bernice stared at his unseeing eyes. He was dead—he must be. She tried to get up. She had to close those dreadful eyes. But her head—it was swimming so—and her legs wouldn't move. There was something wrong.

But it was Theodore who had drunk the martini meant for her.

Theodore was poisoned, dead. What was the matter with her? She hadn't had anything to drink. She'd had nothing!

With the last remnants of her consciousness, Bernice remembered the headache powder.

THEODORE blinked and stood up slowly. He went around the table to Bernice and the first thing he did was to close her eyes. Looking down at her he whispered, "You should have known, my dear. I anticipated your every thought."

He drank the other martini and then put the glass down, rubbing his hands briskly together. He had work to do.

ATTENTION—ALL WESTERN FANS

Have You Met M.S.M.M.'s Companion In Crime?

ZANE GREY WESTERN MAGAZINE

Whenever Western story buffs meet, wherever the Longhorn trails are ridden in fiction by men who really know, Zane Grey's name will come up, as one of the greatest of all Western weavers of the kind of tales which will always live. One of the earliest, and one of the all-times greats, Zane Grey has for decades maintained his deserved standing at the top of all writers of the old West. "Riders of the Purple Sage" and the rest of his great tales will live as long as a diehard reader chooses to dream about the West which was—and is no more. *And now, for the first time, here is a magazine which has targeted every page to the memory and perpetuation of the glory which was Zane Grey's.* In ZANE GREY WESTERN MAGAZINE you will find, exclusively, and for the first time, authentic sequels to the tales he made immortal—written by Romer Zane Grey who grew up as the originals were being written. Don't miss this once-in-a-lifetime treat in Western reading enjoyment. Buy *Zane Grey Western Magazine* today at your dealers!



**A fortune he'd won—but
Murder went with it . . .**

THE FATAL BLACK CHIP

by RICHARD M. ROSE

HE'D BEEN had! Sam Boyd knew that the six of diamonds he had just been dealt had not come off the top of the deck. It was a very slick second deal.

Boyd knew them all—false shuf-

fles, second deals and a variety of other little deceptions with cards. He should. His instructor had been one of the best, a pro-card sharp called Floyd Bates. He had had plenty of time to study Floyd's

moves, two years of trying to stay alive in Korea. That was an eternity or two ago. But the lessons stuck.

Now he looked up from the tentacle-like fingers into the thin face of the blackjack dealer called Whitey. Small, squinty eyes seemed to be looking through him as a razor thin mouth moved about as much as a bad ventriloquist's.

"Another hit, sir?"

Boyd almost laughed. Yes, with a jack face down and the six showing, he would need another hit. And Whitey would see that it was big enough to put him over twenty-one. Which would separate him from his last chip—a black one, worth a C-note.

His last chip, and his last bet. Poof! It would be the end of fat living for him. Then he could pick up his suitcase and catch the next bus for LA. There was an antiquated DC-7 over-loaded with machinery waiting for someone stupid enough to fly to Viet Nam. He would be stupid enough.

"Another hit?" Sam Boyd said. "Sure, why not?"

He watched the tentacle fingers flick out another card. Yes, Whitey was very good. To second deal out of a box, he had to be. And damned if he hadn't just done it again!

Boyd was more curious than angry, because the casinos in Vegas ran clean games. The odds were good enough that they didn't have to cheat. The Starlight included. It was the last of a long line along

"The Strip" that he had hit the past three days.

Like the other big casino-hotels, the Starlight was a city unto itself, embracing everything from health-clubs to nightclubs. All window dressing. The casino itself was where the action was. And the action was continuous, the tide of players ebbing and swelling with the rise and fall of the sun, but never ceasing.

No, the Starlight didn't have to stack the deck. Then why was a house dealer hustling him? It didn't make any sense.

Then Sam Boyd's eyes lowered to the card he had just been dealt. He did a mental double-take. It was a five of clubs. It gave him 21, a winner, unless Whitey came up with the same. But Whitey didn't. He showed nineteen and paid off.

Boyd left one chip down as a bet and waited for new cards. His brain was swirling. Whitey had cheated all right. But for him. Why? No answers. Not even a wild guess.

The next one came off the top. But after a false shuffle. It was a king of spades. It was followed by an ace of hearts. Blackjack! Whitey paid double. Sam studied the skull-like face. Nothing moved but the slit mouth.

"Ante up," it twitched.

No doubt about it, Sam Boyd thought. Whitey is making me a winner. It didn't make the vaguest kind of sense. Nothing to do but go along for the ride. Try and figure it later.

But he didn't figure it. And it didn't stop. He had lost some hands, won some legitimately. But on a few crucial plays, when he laid down a heavy bet, Whitey kept coming through with the big card.

"Mind if I borrow a little of your luck? Mine is simply awful."

The voice filtering through the din of slots and gaming tables was soft and provocative. Boyd looked around. Amber, doe-like eyes smiled at him out of an oval face with firm, high cheekbones. So did the full, heart-shaped mouth. Pale, olive-hued skin contrasted strikingly with satiny black hair. Boyd noted that the white sleeveless cocktail dress was off a boat from Paris, and the trimming of beads and bracelets were for real.

"I think I can spare a little," Boyd said, smiling. He stood up and held a chair for her. "Do you have a name to go with that lovely smile?"

The lovely smile broadened. "It's Linda. Linda Olsen. Now how do you play this game?"

Sam Boyd was about to explain when a voice intervened. "Are you in this hand, sir?"

Boyd whirled around. The voice did not belong to Whitey. Nor did the bespeckled face of the large, balding man who now occupied the dealer's chair.

"What happened to Whitey?" Boyd inquired casually.

"Five o'clock, sir. His shift is over. Are you in this hand?"

Boyd decided he was not. He

filled his pockets with chips, about two thousand worth, he estimated.

"But I haven't bet yet," the girl protested.

"I feel like a change, Boyd said. "And a drink. How about the drink first?"

He was glad when she accepted. He wanted to know Linda Olsen better. He also wanted time to think. To try and figure out what had happened.

As he followed her through the jammed casino, his eyes noted the movement of her wide, generous buttocks. Perhaps he should have wondered why she had made the pass. But he didn't. He had come to take passes from women for granted.

Not that he was handsome, at least not in the classic sense. His sturdy five-feet-ten frame was trim enough, but was not the type that looked at home in a Brooks Brothers or tennis shorts. And the broken nose, taut mouth and curly tangle of grey-specked hair highlighted a face that would not win any screen tests.

But the face and the man still came on strong with the women. Like John Garfield. Myra had called that shot. He was a John Garfield type casting himself as an Ernest Hemingway hero. It was one of her last observations before he walked out on their crumbling marriage.

They found a small crescent-shaped booth in one of the lounges

flanking the casino and ordered scotches. By the time they had finished them and ordered re-fills, Linda Olsen admitted that she had had no more luck with husbands than with gambling. This was her second trip to Nevada, but ex-mate number two had been very generous. She would not have to work. But she would probably go back to modeling anyway, just to have something to do while she re-assembled her life.

"So that's the story of my life, Sam," she concluded with a flurry of cheerfulness that looked a little forced. "What about you?"

Boyd gave her a brief re-play during their second scotches. Korea . . . marriage . . . suburbia . . . the exec job with Phillips Aircraft. Then blowing the whole thing to become a sort of citizen of the world.

He wished he could have done a better job of selling himself. Linda Olsen looked like one of the special ones. But his thoughts kept flitting back to Whitey of the tentacle fingers. There was something hiding in some dark corner of his brain. Something that would explain why he had been set up as a winner. It triggered muffled alarm bells.

So did the tall cowboy type in the wide-brimmed hat and the corduroy sports coat. He was sitting at the next booth. More than once he was sure he saw the sleepy eyes in the rawhide face studying them over the rim of a glass of beer.

Not so unusual, perhaps. After

all, Linda Olsen was very easy to study. Sure, he told himself. That's probably all it was. Just an admirer, so forget it.

He did. They tried the craps table next. It was a bad choice. A few quick rolls, and he was five hundred dollars poorer.

"Oh, that hurt," Linda said, making a face. "Maybe we should try another place. How about the Scheherezade?"

"Sounds good," Sam agreed. "I could use a change of scene."

Boyd lost a quick four hundred at roulette before deciding to try cards again. He spotted a vacancy at a poker table and moved in. He preferred poker to blackjack because he was not playing against the house, just other gamblers like himself, some good, most not so good. The house was content to take its fixed percentage of the pot.

He should have been surprised when it happened, but he was not. The dealer, a stocky, bushy-haired character, had just given him a king of hearts off the bottom in a draw of two cards. It collaborated with the two kings he was holding to win a pot of over eight hundred dollars.

"Sam, your luck has changed," Linda said, her eyes sparkling. "I just know it."

Yeah, it sure has, Sam Boyd agreed silently. Here we go again. But where do we go? What in the hell gives?

He lost the next three hands.

But the one after that, a big one with over fifteen hundred in the pot, Boyd drew one card in an attempt to fill an inside straight. Bushy Hair made sure he filled it, and it did the job.

The next hour passed swiftly. The girl at his side made some excited sounds that Boyd hardly heard. Someone handed him a highball that he barely tasted. He was too intent on the game. Or rather, the game within a game. The one that was making him a very big winner.

When Sam Boyd walked away from the table, he figured he was taking between eight and ten thousand with him. It should have been a good feeling. It was not.

"Isn't it marvelous?" Linda bubbled on his arm. "What will we do next?"

Yeah, what? Boyd asked himself. He couldn't think. His brain was spinning like a roulette wheel. It was still not giving him any answers. But one thing was for certain. Those alarm bells weren't vague anymore. They were loud and urgent.

"I'd like to freshen up a little, Sam," Linda said, "and catch my breath. I never knew that gambling could be so—so exhilarating."

"Only when you win," Sam Boyd said. He decided he could use a little freshening himself. They agreed to meet at the casino bar in fifteen minutes.

The attendant in the spacious rest room provided Boyd with an elec-

tric razor. He felt better after shaving and washing up. Some of the tension began to drain from his body. He was patting on some lime-scented cologne when he noticed the newspaper. It was a crumpled edition of the morning *Sentinel* that lay open on one of the unoccupied shoe-shine chairs. The headline caught his eye and held it: "Wave Of Muggings Continues!" it screamed.

He had read the story that morning. And now, as its details flicked through his mind, the embryo of an idea began to take shape.

For the past three months a number of big winners had been rolled. Mugging was nothing new to Vegas. But the *Sentinel* implied that this time it looked like the work of some organized gang.

It pointed out that the pattern was always the same. All the victims were obscure John Doe types. Always alone. Small bettors who suddenly got very lucky. They had won fast and lost faster. Some were found in motel rooms. Others in the desert, with no idea of how they got there or who had rolled them. Most had been busted up pretty badly. Apparently the muscle enjoyed his work.

All this came flooding back into Boyd's mind as he stared at the paper. He was remembering what Floyd, his card-sharp buddy, had told him about professional dealers who were caught cheating for themselves. The lucky ones were only

crippled. Which made setting up a confederate as a winner a very risky-type side play for a dealer. Maybe even fatal.

But what if there was a less risky way? Subtle, more sophisticated. Like maybe making some unknown John Doe character the winner. Set him up as an unsuspecting accomplice. A few key dealers scattered along The Strip just might get the job done. And when he had enough chips, they would cash the poor sucker in by rolling him. He thinks he's won honestly and lost dishonestly. So do the cops and the casino bosses. So they look for muggers instead of crooked dealers.

Sam Boyd found himself almost admiring the set-up. Almost! He was not forgetting that if he was right, then he was the next scheduled John Doe.

Okay, so what do you do? Go to the police, of course. Be a good citizen. But there was no sport in that . . . and no profit. And he had come to Vegas for both.

But there was another way. You keep letting them make you a winner. Then when you think they're ready to flex the muscle, you disappear—with the money, of course.

Risky business, especially if they tumbled that he was wise. In that event, Sam knew that he could expect more than just a beating. They would probably have to kill him. Yeah, damned risky. But he had taken risks before. Flying those flimsy Piper Cubs on recon runs in

Korea hadn't been the safest way to fight a war. But at least this time the stakes were right.

"Got a light, friend?"

Boyd's eyes snapped up. The raw-hide face he had seen earlier was hovering over him, a cigarette clinging to tobacco-stained lips.

Boyd dug a boklet of matches out of his pocket.

"Sure, be my guest," he said, forcing a grin. He knew that this was one of them. Maybe the muscle. And keeping very close tabs on him. Why? Did they suspect that he was wise?

"Thanks," the big man said, striking a match. "How's your luck runnin'?"

"Great. I've got a hot broad and a hot streak, and I'm gonna burn up The Strip with them!" He hoped he was coming across the clod they obviously took him for.

The brownish lips stretched into a lazy grin. "You do that, friend. You give 'em hell."

A few minutes later Sam found Linda at the bar and mounted the empty stool beside her. The dark scotch waiting for him was welcome medication from the tightness in his throat and stomach.

"I've never seen anything like it, Sam," Linda was saying. "Are you always so lucky?"

"Only with women—and especially tonight," Sam said grinning. But the grin hurt. He was remembering another detail of that article. There had always been a girl.

A different girl, according to the various descriptions of the John Does. Not local hookers with police records, but unknowns, like the victims themselves. It figured. Whitey and friends would need someone to steer their marks to the right dealers. Someone soft and shapely.

He had to give them credit. They had picked well. A tramp type wouldn't have hooked him. But Linda Olsen, or whatever her name was, had taken him in completely. Too bad. He had liked Linda Olsen. But she didn't exist. The lovely girl next to him was just another hustler. A better actress than most, but that was the only difference. To hell with her!

"Drink up, baby," he said, gulping his scotch. "We're going to really clean up now."

And they did. Not all at once, or in the same casinos. They hit several along the Strip and sampled most of the games. Most were honest. It would be too dangerous to rig a wheel or use loaded dice. No, the cheating was done strictly with cards. And every time he began to run a losing streak, Sam Boyd let himself be steered to another dealer who promptly turned his luck around.

He counted five dealers, including Whitey, who were in on it. Cowboy and the girl made seven. There were probably others. How many he didn't know. But he did know that they would have to get him alone. The girl's job, of course. A



nightcap in her room, or maybe an invitation for a romantic drive under the stars. That would be his cue to fade.

The problem was not when but how. Boyd hadn't spotted Cowboy again. But he knew he wouldn't be far away. Somehow, he'd have to shake him. That might not be so easy.

Boyd felt the girl snuggle against him in the back seat of the cab that was taking them to the next casino.

"I can't tell you how I've enjoyed tonight, Sam," she said. "It's—it's been a long time."

Boyd tried to ignore the feeling of that soft, deliciously scented body against his as he said, "I'll second

that, Angel. Think my luck will hold?"

"I think it will hold any time with me, Sam."

Soft, wet lips caressed the corner of his mouth. Sam forced his eyes away from hers and onto the luminous hands of his wrist watch. One thirty. Still early. But he figured he had amassed about thirty-five thousand—five in chips, and thirty in bills that he had gradually accumulated by cashing in. He was getting rich enough for the hit. Careful, Sam, he thought. Don't get greedy. Just one more play. Then fade.

The one more proved to be a mistake. Not financially, because he got hot. Honestly hot at the craps table of The Plantation House casino. He was betting wild and recklessly. And winning. He knew that he should cash in and get the hell out of there. But he couldn't. He had the fever. Just one more roll. "Seven," the stickman's voice echoed in its indifferent monotone. Another winner.

Then a rawhide face suddenly appeared in the perimeter of faces around the table. All eyes were mesmerized by the two little cubes of ivory. Cowboy's included. But Sam Boyd saw them flick briefly toward the girl at his side. Then he felt her lean against him.

"Darling, I'm pooped," she purred softly into his ear. "Want to buy me a pooped-cap?"

"Love to, Angel, but I'm too hot to quit now."

He threw the dice. Boxcars. The croupier's stick flicked out and raked away a stack of chips. His luck was turning.

"Then, I'll buy you one," the sultry voice in his ear persisted. "At my place. I've taken a cabana near here. If you're nice, I might let you tuck me in."

Boyd turned to look into the soft eyes. Soft and inviting—and as deadly as quicksand.

"Later, Angel. Just a few more rolls."

He felt something being pressed into his hand. It was a key. She kissed him quickly on the side of the mouth. "The address is on the tag. Don't be long, darling."

Then she was gone. Boyd watched her melt into the crowd, then panned his eyes back to Cowboy. He was not moving. That figured. Cowboy would make sure that he used that key. If he didn't, they would know that he was wise. This was it. He had to lose Cowboy. Fast! But how?

Boyd felt someone behind him straining to watch the action over his shoulder. It gave him an idea.

The man behind him edged closer exuding an odor of stale cigar smoke and bourbon. Boyd stepped back suddenly, his elbow punching a grunt out of a soft belly. He whirled and confronted a red, pudgy face with an angry snarl.

"Watch it, mac! I don't like people hanging all over me when I gamble!"

The pudgy face collapsed into an

apologetic grin. "Sorry, fella. I didn't mean—"

He didn't finish. Sam Boyd put one hand against his chest and shoved hard. The pudgy man flew backward, arms flapping comically, and collided with a waiter carrying a tray full of drinks. They went down in a shower of scotch, ice cubes and broken glass.

Someone swore. Someone laughed. And everyone around stopped to watch the show. Boyd saw two hulks in tuxes materialize out of the crowd and quickly flank him.

"Hey, wait a minute!" he started to protest, as they effortlessly gathered him up under the armpits.

"No conversation, pal!" one of the hulks grunted.

Boyd made none.

The two hulks hustled him towards the entrance, the crowd parting and closing behind them. Boyd craned his neck. He could see a cowboy hat bobbing above the cluster of heads that followed them. In a second they were outside. A cab moved into a position at a signal from the doorman. One hulk opened the door, and the other shoved him roughly inside.

"Go play somewhere else, pal! Come back here, and I'll break your arm!"

The cab driver looked around, an obnoxious smirk spread out across his lean face. "Where to, mister?"

"Just out of here, friend! Move

fast enough and you earn yourself twenty bucks."

The cab left a slick of hot rubber in front of the Plantation House. As it plunged into the flow of traffic that moved along Las Vegas Boulevard, Boyd looked out the rear window in time to see Cowboy emerge from the entrance. There was a group of people ahead of him waiting for cabs. And no cabs. Tough luck, Boyd thought, a smile edging his mouth. He was practically home free!

Boyd gave the driver an address. Ten minutes later, the cab pulled into the court of the Deuces Wild Motel, one of the numerous second-rate motels that litter the Boulevard between The Strip and downtown Vegas. Boyd directed the driver to a door near the rear of the court and told him to wait. He knew he did not have much time. They would know where he was staying. They had set him up too professionally to have missed that little detail. Cowboy would probably check with the girl first to see if he showed, then he would come here.

Boyd unlocked the door and went in. A bar of light from the illuminated court reached into the dark room ahead of him and sprawled across the Hollywood bed. His packed suitcase lay open on the foot of the bed where he had left it. He crossed quickly to it, put most of his money inside, and snapped it shut. He was about to hoist it off the bed when a soft voice

behind him cut the silence like a switchblade.

"Freeze, Boyd!"

Sam Boyd froze. So did his blood.

He had heard that voice before. From across a blackjack table. The cadaverous face of Whitey, the dealer, emerged from the shadows. Light danced off the barrel of the '38 in his right hand. On the end of the barrel was a silencer. Boyd tried to fight back the panic that was gnawing at his guts as he said, "What's the pitch, Whitey? Bad loser?"

"Just do like you're told, Boyd, and this thing won't go off," Whitey said softly. "Get rid of that guy."

Boyd called the cab driver over to the partly open door and shoved some bills at him. He had no choice, not with that '38 jabbed between two of his ribs.

"Very good, Boyd," Whitey said when the cab had left. He snapped the lock on the door and switched on a small lamp on the end of a long dresser. "Now on the bed. Face down, arms over your head."

Boyd did as he was told. "Mind telling me what this is all about, friend?"

"I knew you was wise, Boyd," Whitey's voice replied. "The others, they wouldn't believe me. But Whitey knew."

"Wise?" Boyd stalled, his brain throbbing. "About what?"

"I could see it. In your eyes, Boyd. That's my job, see? Reading a man's cards in his eyes. Most

grinds, they sweat. Even when they're winning, they sweat. But you were too cool, too sure of yourself. Like you knew you were going to win."

"You lost me, friend," Boyd said hoarsely. "I've got no idea what in the hell you're talking about."

Whitey ignored the protest. Boyd heard the sound of a telephone being dialed, and moved his head just enough to see Whitey using the phone on the table next to the bed. Whitey dialed with his left hand, the receiver laying on the table. His right continued to hold the gun.

Then Whitey picked up the receiver and said, "This is Whitey. I'm at the pigeon's motel. He was gonna run. Like I figured, this pigeon was just too smart."

Whitey listened for a few seconds before speaking again. "Okay. But make it fast." He cradled the receiver.

"Look, friend, if it's the money you want—" Boyd began.

Whitey cut him off with a contemptuous laugh. "Cool it, Boyd. We'll take the money all right. Which leaves you busted, cleaned. So you get drunk, see. Stinking drunk. Then you steal yourself a car. Stupid. A guy could get himself killed being so stupid, you agree?"

Sam Boyd got the picture. An accident. That's why Whitey had made the call. He would need help to set it up. Cowboy, probably, and maybe some of his friends.

"I—I see," he said. His stomach



felt like a can full of worms. "Why not just put a bullet in me?"

Whitey chuckled mirthlessly. "A bullet buys too much heat, Boyd. And heat we got enough of already. Like I told them, time to put that show on the road. Set up in another spot. Tahoe, maybe."

Boyd hardly heard him. He was trying to figure how much time he had. If Cowboy and friends stole the car first, he still had some breathing room. But if they didn't then they would be there in minutes. His mind raced desperately for a way out and came up with a big zero.

Whitey had straddled the straight-backed chair in front of the dresser, the '38 resting on the back of the chair. A half dozen feet separated him from the gun. But a bullet

would cover the distance quicker than he could. What he needed was some kind of diversion. Something to take those squinty eyes off him for a second.

"Don't try it, Boyd!"

Sam Boyd was suddenly aware that he had been moving. His body went as rigid as death at the sound of Whitey's voice.

"I don't want to use the gun, Boyd," Whitey continued, "but if you call my hand, I will, heat or no heat!"

Boyd studied the gambler's face and knew he wasn't bluffing. Why should he? Hell, he had all the good cards. So he just lay there, waiting. What else could he do? Nothing. He could wait and listen to the trip-hammer pounding of his heart. He could wait . . . and feel the bedspread become moist with his own perspiration. He could wait . . . and try to figure how much time had passed.

Seconds? Minutes? He didn't know. All he knew was that it was running out. And those squinty eyes never left him. In fact, the eyes didn't so much as blink at the sound of the car pulling into the court.

"That's it, Boyd," Whitey said. "End of the line."

Boyd could hear the car approaching slowly. Then its headlights were illuminating the cheap, violet-colored drapes covering the single picture window that faced the court. Or nearly covered. One headlight sent a thin beam of light slicing

through the two- inch opening at the edge of the window. Sam saw it strike the cadaverous face.

The squinty eyes blinked. Sam Boyd moved. Clutching the pillow, he rolled off the bed toward Whitey and threw the pillow with one motion. The pillow struck Whitey's face. At the same instant, the '38 flashed with a soft deadly sound that was muffled by the silencer. Something slashed at Sam's right side like an animal's fangs. But a second later his body was smashing into Whitey as he rose from the chair. Boyd's left hand found the dealer's gun hand just in time. He forced the hand back just as the '38 flamed again. The slug tore into the ceiling, showering them with plaster.

They struggled there against the dresser like two punch-drunk fighters. Whitey swore as he desperately tried to tear himself from Boyd's grip. His free hand, balled into a fist, thudded painfully against Boyd's face.

He ignored it. His only thought was to get the gun before Cowboy and friends broke in. Whitey had given him an edge by locking the door. But it was a thin edge. The lock would snap with a few well-directed kicks.

Boyd hammered Whitey's gun hand against the top of the dresser. He could not jar the gun loose. His own strength was ebbing away under the relentless blows that pounded his face. His right side was on fire.

Then behind him came the sound of a foot striking the door. It spurred him to one final effort. He worked his right hand up under Whitey's chin, forcing him back half onto the low dresser. Then with all of his last strength, he snapped the head backward. It struck the mirror. The mirror instantly dissolved into an intricate cobweb of cracks. He shoved again. The mirror shattered.

Whitey's body went mushy in his arms. The '38 slipped out of his hand before Boyd could grab it, struck the edge of the dresser, and fell to the floor. Sam dropped Whitey and dove for the gun.

"Hold it, Boyd!"

Boyd's hand stopped a foot from the '38. He knew that the ugly '45 automatic in the hand of the big man who filled the doorway would cut him in two before he could reach it. Suddenly, the rest of his strength left him. He sank slowly to his knees like a man in drunken prayer.

A big hand reached down in front of him, picked up Whitey's '38 and shoved it into his belt. Boyd waited for the '45 to come crashing down against his skull. It didn't. Instead, the big hand was holding something in front of his face. Boyd blinked, and it came blurrily into focus. It seemed to be some kind of badge fastened to the inside of a wallet.

"My name's Canton, Mr. Boyd," the big man drawled. "I'm a deputy on special assignment for the sheriff."

"Special assignment?" Sam said vaguely.

"Right. There's been a crime wave of muggings in Vegas. It looked like an organized gang was responsible. So we've been kinda floating around the casinos, keeping our eyes open for potential targets. You looked like you were riding a pretty good winning streak back there at the Starlight. You confirmed it yourself when I bummed a match from you. Remember?"

Sam nodded. He suddenly wanted to laugh, but it got stuck somewhere in his throat.

"That girl picking you up made me even more suspicious. The others had all been set up by chicks. And you kept winning. So I stayed with you. Looks like I was right. Hey, I know this fella." Canton had turned Whitey over. "He's a dealer at the Starlight."

"One or more of his friends should be along shortly," Sam said in a voice that was more of a croak.

"That so?" said Canton. He closed the door and crossed quickly to the telephone.

As he put through a hurried call to the sheriff's office, Boyd managed to drag himself to his feet. His legs felt like wet kleenex. They got him as far as the bed. Somehow he managed to wrestle a cigarette out of a crumpled pack. He fumbled in his pockets for a light and came up with chips. Canton flipped a booklet of matches onto the bed. It took three

tries for Sam Boyd to get a match lit.

After a couple of deep drags he said, "How'd you find me, anyway?" He was certain he had lost Canton back at the Plantation House.

"Called the motel and gave the night clerk your description," the big man said as he cradled the receiver. "He had a good memory, Mr. Boyd."

Boyd watched him cross the room to the window, gun in hand, and peer into the silent court outside. He looked very competent.

"That's fine," Boyd said. "But how did you know I was staying at this motel?"

"Oh that," Canton said without turning. "You know, you got lucky there, Mr. Boyd. Because I lost you when those pitmen bounced you out of the Plantation House. But you left your address with me."

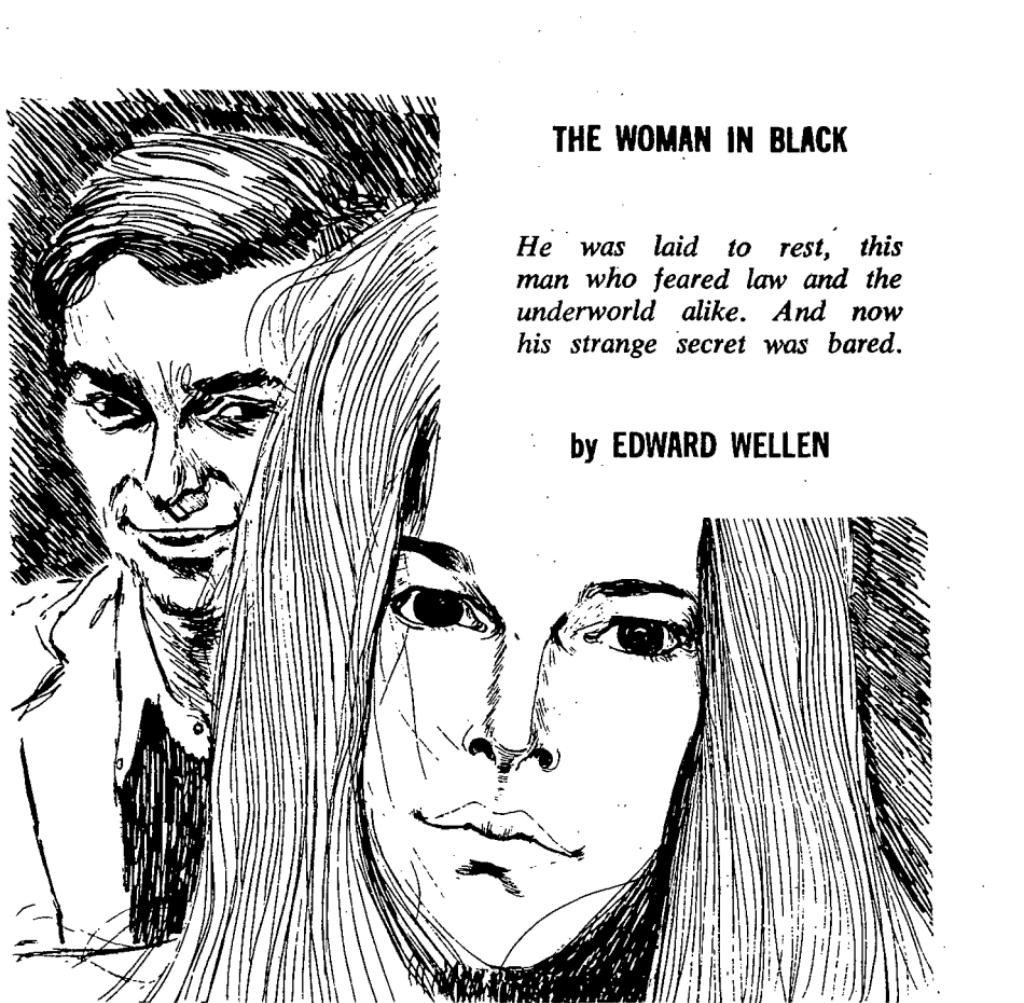
Boyd took another deep drag. He was beginning to feel better. "Address? I don't get it."

"Take a look at that match booklet. It's the one you gave me earlier."

Boyd took a look. The booklet lauded the comfort and convenience of the Deuces Wild Motel in bold script lettering. This time the laugh came out. Deputy Canton looked at him with a puzzled smile as tears streamed down Sam's face.

"What's so funny, Mr. Boyd?"

"Nothing . . . nothing," Boyd choked. "It's just that I finally realized what a lousy John Garfield I'd make."



THE WOMAN IN BLACK

He was laid to rest, this man who feared law and the underworld alike. And now his strange secret was bared.

by EDWARD WELLEN

MRS. JAY ELLIS wished Jay could have seen his own funeral. He would have found more than satisfying the way it was being carried out. Then too she knew she was looking her best in black. Practicing lines of grief in her mirror had done no harm; they gave her slightly too full face the gaunt beauty of a fashion model.

She sat in the alcove and looked

out through the curtains at the crowd. From time to time an old friend or acquaintance or curious stranger stepped into the alcove to mumble condolences or simply to squeeze her hand sympathetically. She felt like the star of a show.

Even that stubby blue-jawed police detective who had followed her for months, hoping she'd lead him to Jay's hideout, was eyeing

her with an almost comical mournfulness. It was the first she saw him with his hat off; it pleased her that he had to comb his hair strategically.

The pall of hush hung heavy in the air. Jay would have enjoyed the solemnity. She could almost feel his elbow digging in her ribs; his face of course would remain grave.

She watched people filing past the casket. They would step up to the coffin, stare down, step quickly away, passing on with a slight shudder.

One glance at the corpse was enough.

Undertaker's wax plugged the bullet holes in the head of the deceased and makeup covered the seared flesh of the departed but it was still no pretty display.

So the eye turned naturally to Mrs. Ellis. There was nothing more pleasing to the eye than the widow, black heightening her pale beauty and long blonde hair, bravely bearing up under the burden of grief. And Mrs. Ellis was responsive. She held a trembling broken smile and now and again touched a wisp of lace to her eyes.

Her eyes missed nothing. The police were there, in mufti but in force, the way police always were after a killing. They were covering the funeral to see who turned up; they were hoping to get leads to the killer.

An expendable member of the mob was there too, stiff and self-conscious. She knew him as a small-

time bookie; at least he was that whenever the police had to make a record of arrests and the mob had to put up a fall guy. It was the first she saw him without a dead cigar in his mouth.

Maybe he was there to make sure the florist had delivered all the flowers the mob had paid for, maybe to make sure there was indeed a corpse. The mob had been so anxious to silence Jay, keep him from spilling to the D.A. Poor Jay, what a tightrope he walked, hiding from the mob and the law both. Now his worries were over.

That detective was in the alcove with her and he was telling her how terrible it was for Jay to go like that, but they would do their best to get his killer. The way they figured it, Jay must have felt a cold wind blowing down his neck—someone, law or mob, was coming too close. He tried to make a break for it. It turned out to be the mob after him, because they shot to kill, and Jay's car wrapped itself around a tree and the gas tank exploded and—the detective made a grimace in the direction of the coffin.

"We'll get the guy who did that, Mrs. Ellis," he said in his gravelly voice.

She managed a wan smile.

He would have gone on croaking but just then the nice looking young undertaker's man signed discreetly to her that it was time for the services to begin. The detective awkwardly took his leave of her.

Before she left the shrouded alcove she stole a glance in her mirror and quickly powdered her face to mask the glow of pleasure. She was feeling again the strange thrill of shopping for the trappings of death and mourning. The tombstone carver, hammer and chisel vibrant, whitening with dust. The catalog with sheet after sheet of padded boxes, wood, bronze, and stone. The florist with his murmuring of how the color and brightness of flowers render the funeral less bleak and less depressing by setting a mood that helped the mourner to remember the pleasant parts of the dear one's life and by making thinking back on the funeral comforting rather than distressing.

And last but not least the fitting for her dress.

She squeezed out a tear and when she emerged the room was a blur. An arm helped her to find her place in the front row.

The minister rose and planted himself before the coffin and the banks of floral pieces. Mrs. Ellis bowed her head slightly as she listened to his intoning. She prepared to allow his words to move her but as they rolled out they were so general as to be meaningless. Poor guy, he was having one hell of a time to find something nice to say about Jay. He showed it; whenever his eyes turned toward her they seemed to take on a glint of guilt.

She smiled a melancholy smile to



encourage him. But that seemed only to fluster him further.

Jay would have enjoyed the minister's plight. But the main thing was, the funeral as a whole was going off smoothly, just the way Jay wanted it.

She dabbed at her eyes and heard murmurs of sympathy from the rows behind her. The intoning went on and on, making up in length for depth. But strangely enough she began to find sound as moving as meaning would have been. She touched the wisp of lace to her eyes more and more frequently.

Then, bit by bit, it crept into her awareness. At first it was a whispering patter like a handful of dirt on a coffin. Then it was massing like rumor, till it seemed to fill the chapel with its invisible substance. Something or somebody was drawing attention away from Mrs. Ellis.

Quickly she erased a frown. Without seeming to, she strained to discover the source.

She heard a muffled feminine sobbing and caught the wafting of an expensive scent. She grew stiff. Slowly she slid her gaze around to track this disturbing presence. But the presence tantalizingly remained out of sight.

Mrs. Ellis chose to take to heart a not-outstanding word of comfort—the minister looked surprised and somewhat gratified, and repeated himself—and turned her head as if to avert her eyes from the hard fact of the coffin. She saw at the very back of the room a pretty woman in black with a wet hankerchief and red eyes.

Mrs. Ellis could feel the flesh of her face turning heavy as clay. The woman in black seemed to be trying to keep in the background, seemed to be trying to strifle her sobbing, but there was no shadow of doubt that she was mourning, and mourning deeply, the passing of Jay.

The whispering died away but Mrs. Ellis knew everyone wondered who this woman was and why she showed a face full of sorrow and suffering at Jay's dying Mrs. Ellis' face closed, her melancholy smile faded away. She threw the woman a glance more chilling than the grave, then quickly veiled her eyes and faced forward and bowed her head.

Several times more Mrs. Ellis found it necessary to avert her glance from the coffin. Under cover of the wisp of lace she eyed the woman in black dangerously, keenly.

The woman in black was striving

to hold back her grief, to still her lamenting. But as the minister continued his intoning she at last gave up the struggle and burying her face in her hands surrendered herself to the wracking of deep grief.

At this Mrs. Ellis froze; she did not turn around again. For the remainder of the ceremony she sat graven, facing the coffin stoically and ground her teeth.

The remainder of the ceremony seemed unending to her. Inside her still form she was writhing, like a sword restless in its sheath. She kept asking herself, *Can't the old guy stop mouthing his meaningless words?* Earlier she had felt like pouting because she would miss out on a nice ride out into the country in a caravan of long sleek limousines headlights on in the morning sunshine to show they were part of the cortege, and herself the center of attraction as though she were a movie star on the way to an opening.

Now she was glad Jay had told her to ask for cremating of the remains; she would not have to endure all that graveside business and the mockery that woman in black would have made of it.

The ceremony ended finally. Mrs. Ellis shook the minister by leaving with indecent haste. She made for the back of the room and looked around. But the woman in black was gone.

Mrs. Ellis felt her skin tighten around her nose and mouth. The

wisp of lace came in handy to cover the pinched mean look and made it seem a sudden access of sorrow. Her hasty exit became understandable after all.

But she still did not reach the street in time. When her eyes unblurred from the blaze of late morning, when the darkness of too much light passed away, the woman in black was nowhere in sight.

Mrs. Ellis said, "Damn."

She turned left. She walked quickly though blindly—blind with a raging, not a weeping, blindness. She breathed heavily, breathed in and out the basic elements of life, oxygen and carbon, with a mind full of death.

Jay felt so sure of himself now that he hadn't bothered to bolt the door. She burst in. Jay jumped to his feet, spilling his beer. His eyes darted to windows, to doors.

"Oh," she said, "the whole damn thing went off just fine." She smiled. "Letter perfect."

He regained his poise. "See?" He wreathed his face in a smile. The smile showed a tooth missing. "I told you it would." Then a shadow crossed his brow. "So why the hell did you come here? You trying to spoil it all?"

She smiled sweetly. "How could I spoil it all?"

He choked. "If they tailed you, of course. Don't play dumb."

"Now why would they tail me now? If they tailed anyone"—her

face and voice lost their sweetness—"it would be that floozy."

"What floozy?"

"The dame you took up with while you were hiding out."

"What dame?"

"Oh, was there more than one?"

"I said what dame?"

"Don't you play dumb. Why else would she come to your funeral and cry her poor little busted heart out" She grew *reproachful*. "You should've told her it wouldn't be you in the box."

"Now, listen—"

"You must've treated her very nice before you decided to dump her. She took your passing terribly big."

"I said what dame?"

She eyed him scornfully.

His face contorted in rage and he raised his hand. Her eyes dared him to strike her. They stood that way for a moment. Then he made an appeasing grimace and used his fist to pound his chest.

"Something I ate: sick's a dog last night."

"You're still better off than the guy in the coffin."

"Now let's start all over again."

"That's why you killed a guy your build and staged the shooting and burning. So we could start all over again under a new name in a new place."

"You know what I mean. Let's start all over again from the minute you came in that door. I know it must be something important if you

risked coming here. What is it, honey?"

"Don't waste your breath sweet-talking me. We both know you need me to collect the insurance on you. I want to warn you that you're not two-timing me again, taking the money and running off with that dame or some other floozy."

"I tell you I don't know what the hell you're talking about. There's never been any dame but—any woman but you."

"If you think I really care about any affair you may have had with a floozy like that, pardon me if I laugh. What gets me is having her openly mourning you, busting in on my grief. That's what mortifies me."

He was barely holding his temper. "Now, listen—"

"We'll worry later about collecting the insurance money and what comes after that. All I want right now is her name and where she lives. I'll fix her good. Tell me."

He lost his hold on his temper and went for her. They were locked in each other's arms, struggling, when the door shot open.

They broke apart, scratched and torn. The stubby blue-jawed detective was in the room. His gun cov-

ered them. Jay slowly raised his hands.

"That's right, Ellis."

The detective motioned both of them to turn to the wall. Mrs. Ellis obeyed numbly. The detective moved quickly and in a moment cold steel was linking her to her husband. The detective used the phone, then grew conversational, waiting.

"You can turn back now. You know, Ellis, we figured you were killing two birds—getting out from between the law and the mob and, with the missus collecting the insurance, getting the stake to start up elsewhere. Make that three birds. In spite of him being in your car and in your clothes and with your identification, and in spite of you knocking one of your own filled teeth out and leaving it by him, we knew the corpse wasn't you."

Mrs. Ellis came out of her trance. "But I don't understand why you shadowed me just now. I never led you to him before. Why didn't you follow that woman who was making a scene?"

"Now why would I do that? She'd only lead me back to the precinct house. She's a policewoman."



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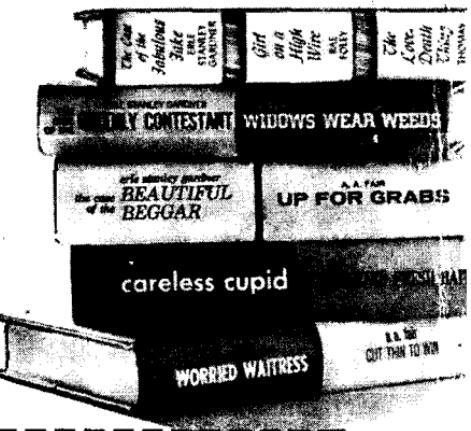
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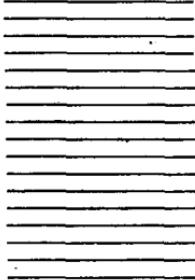


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